

FROM CAIRO TO THE SUDAN FRONTIER



BY H. D. TRAILL.



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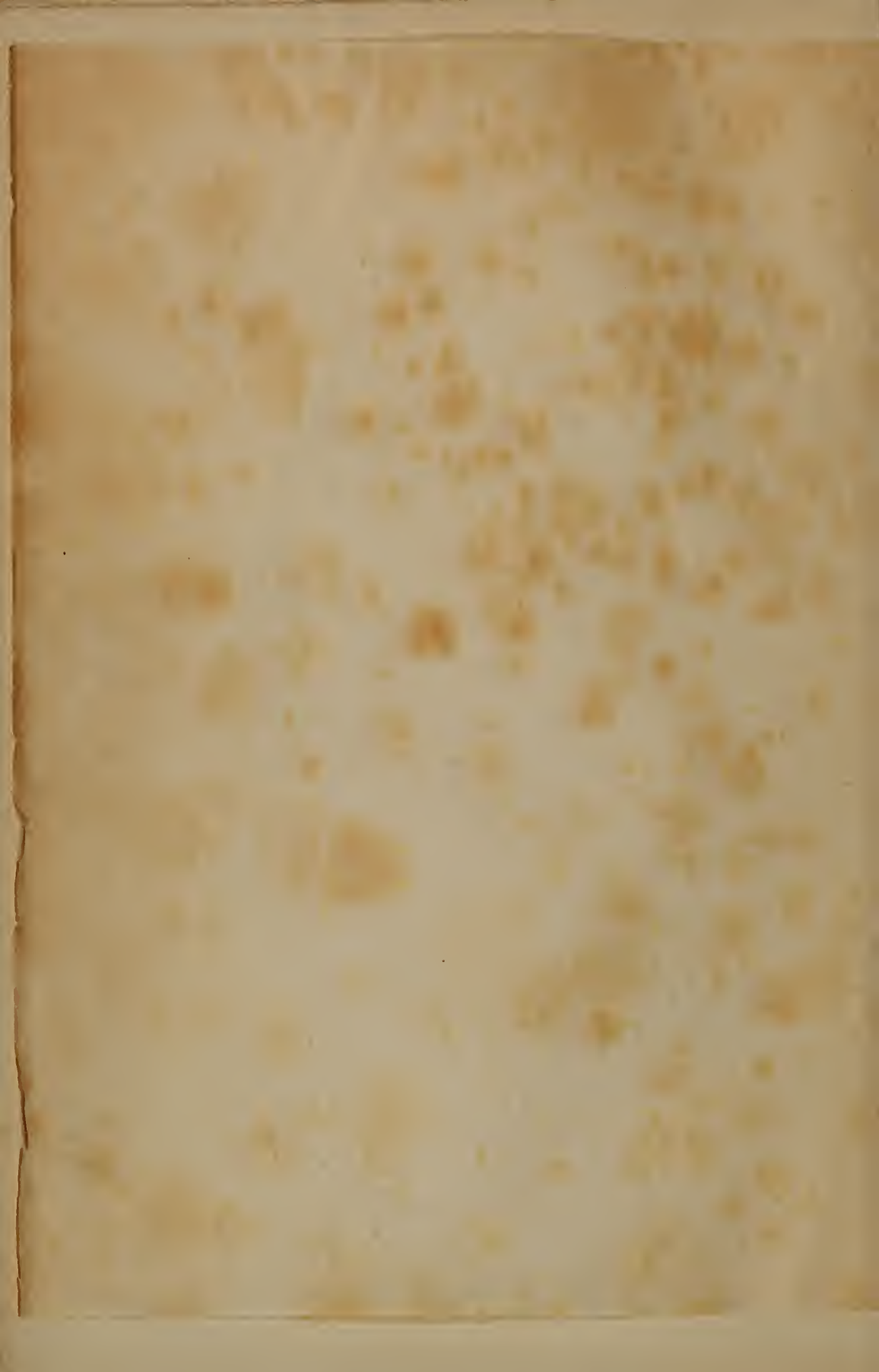
Birthday. 2nd Sept^r 1906

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BY ED. TRAILL
LONDON: JOHN LANE
CHICAGO: WAX AND
WILLIAMS 1900



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LONDON. JOHN LANE.
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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

P R E F A C E

THE sketches here published pretend to no other character than that of a record of impressions derived from a couple of brief tours in Egypt during the winters of 1893-4 and 1895-6. But it is hoped that their interest, such as it is—and some interest can hardly fail to attach to any truthful description of one of the most interesting countries in the world—may have been to some extent enhanced by the events of which the Nile Valley has subsequently become the scene.

I have attempted in these pages to portray to the best of my ability the life and character, the aspect and the manners of

that ancient and unchanging people, for whose destinies England, the last of many great Empires to undertake that duty, has by so strange a series of chances become responsible. At the time when my latest chapters were penned some weeks had yet to pass before the orders were given for the forward movement into the Soudan. But advance was already "in the air." Workmen were busy repairing the iron-plates of the armoured transports at Shel-lâl; signs of unwonted military activity, indefinable but unmistakable, were to be discerned at Wady Halfa; the restlessness of the Dervishes, especially as evidenced by their recent audacious and successful raid on a Nubian river village, well within the line of the English defences, was in all Egyptian mouths. Enough was to be seen to fill the mind of the least expert of civilians with suspicions which it needed only

the obstinate taciturnity of the military authorities to confirm.

Nor apart from these immediate premonitions of a forward movement could even the civilian aforesaid have failed to appreciate the cogency of the standing arguments for an advance. Every league of the Nile Valley from Assuân to Wady Halfa, and every line in the conformation of Wady Halfa itself is eloquent of them. For near two hundred miles of water-way you travel through a land of almost desolation ; often between rocks or desert reaching to the very river brim, never with more than the narrowest ribbon of tilth or herbage interposed between them and the stream. At the end of your journey you come to a so-called frontier "post," which might as well have been anywhere else in the wide wilderness for all that Nature has done to help man strengthen it. Another ten score

miles beyond it spreads a fair and fruitful tract of country, worth defending and easier to defend, which was once in possession of the owners of Assuân and Wady Halfa. The sight and knowledge of these three things must impress even the most careless or prejudiced of English observers. The truth becomes plain to him, perhaps, for the first time that what was done by Mr. Gladstone's Government in obedience to the real or supposed exigencies of the military and financial situation in 1884, was to compel Egypt to abandon a richly fertile and readily defensible district, in order to draw an essentially arbitrary and unnatural frontier across a long and narrow strip of well-nigh worthless river-valley, whose inhabitants it is, from that position, almost impossible to protect.

The doubts which exercise the patriotic minds of Mr. Labouchere and his party as

to the expediency of effacing this artificial and mischievous delimitation seldom trouble those who have visited the country for themselves. The question of thrusting back the ever menacing hordes of marauding barbarism from those marches of African civilisation of which we have become the wardens—nay, the greater question of reconquering the vast region over which the beginnings at least of that civilisation once extended—does not delay them long. They think of the thousand miles of peace and industry, and simple contentment, and pathetic defencelessness through which they have passed; of the flood of savagery that beats for ever upon those ill-protecting barriers, and of the deeps of human misery that lie beyond; and they can have no doubt of the direction in which the duty of England points. Perhaps then, as has been said, the pages which follow may have

a strengthened claim on the attention of the reader as from the pen of one who and whose fellow-travellers were among the last of the detachments of English tourists to visit Wady Halfa before the advance, and to look forth across its frontier over that far-stretching waste of anarchy into which the troops of Egypt, under the leadership of her protector, are now penetrating: under, it is true, the grudging and malevolent eyes of English Radicals, but with the hearty God-speed of every friend of order and good government and human happiness throughout the English-speaking world.

H. D. T.

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FROM CAIRO TO THE SOUDAN FRONTIER

CHAPTER I

LIFE AT SEA

IT is two hours since we picked our way between Scylla and Charybdis—no such mighty difficult feat to the navigators of to-day as it so strangely seems to have been to the sailors of the ancient world—and settled down for our two days' further run to our Egyptian port. Reggio and Messina have long since disappeared ; the spurs of Etna, which almost challenged comparison with their parent height as we were issuing from the Straits, have dwindled into knolls and hillocks, and for well-nigh an hour the great bare cone has stood out black and solitary against the deep orange of the western sky. Sicily itself has

become one with its "mountain of old name;" there is nothing to be seen of the romantic island but its giant volcano, nothing left to recall any one of its clustering multitude of classic legends, save only the earliest and sternest of them all. The home of nymph and shepherd, of sacred fountain and love-sick river god, has vanished, and the everlasting prison of the buried Titan alone remains. But that grim donjon glooms at our departing vessel for long. It is still faintly visible when the pale lilac of the sky has melted into a still paler blue, when the flame-tipped purple of the sunset-wrack has become a lustreless brown, when the silver sheen of twilight has faded from the darkening waters. It is a race between the mists and the night to hide it first, and it would be hard to say which wins. Dusk or the sea-haze does at last hide it, leaving visible only the glimmering phantom of the Italian mainland, which itself, also, is soon swallowed up in the night. Then the moon glides, queen-

like, into her great throne-room of the heavens; the evening star calls up its slow and timid followers into the presence; the night-breeze begins to marshal her ermine-clad court of clouds; and then—why then the ineffable poetry of the hour and the scene is broken by the unspeakable prose of the dinner bell.

Life, as Carlyle observed at a moment when he was able to contemplate it undisturbed by dyspepsia, is a "conflux of two eternities." The sea and sky, when the last streak of land has disappeared, become a conflux of two virtual infinities. Life on the sea, therefore, being spent amid a combination of illimitables—at a representation of the Absolute, "supported," so to speak, "by the whole strength of the company"—one might well expect the spirit of man to be answerably affected by the solemnity of its surroundings. The correct thing for it to do, I believe, is "to beat against the bars of its fleshly prison," and to "long for absorption in the all-embracing Universe." Our muddy vesture of

decay should grossly close us in no longer. A starry night on deck should speak to us more eloquently than it spoke to Lorenzo and Jessica on their moonlit bank, and the quiring of the spheres to the young-eyed cherubim should be audible above the wash of the flying waters, and perhaps even the throb of the engines.

As a matter of fact, however, there is no situation in which the spirit of man seems more eminently contented with its corporeal captivity than at this moment when it should be struggling for its freedom. The only result of these communings of his with the Infinite seems to be to magnify immensely his interest in the infinitesimal. Space, Time, Matter, and the Void, the One and the Many—all these vast and imposing abstractions appear to efface themselves in his imagination. As to Space, he is only conscious of it in its limitations while he is dressing. Time shrinks to an arbitrary though convenient method of computing the intervals between

meals. Towards the close of each such period he becomes temporarily conscious of the Void; and in the perpetually recurring struggle with these repasts he may perhaps find a symbol of the eternal antithesis between the One and the Many, and of the eternal effort of the Many to merge itself in the One. The human mind, in short, instead of expanding in this transcendental company, contracts. Its emotions, at a moment when they might be expected to range the universe, assume their most egotistically personal shape; and when its intellectual and spiritual powers ought—in common decency, one might almost say—to predominate, its primitive, even its savage, instincts are supreme. Man, or, at any rate, average man, approaches as near to the condition of mechanism as, perhaps, it is possible for him to approach without actually becoming a machine. Human life is reduced to its purely animal processes, and the great facts and forces of Nature exist for the sole

purpose of ministering to them. The sun rises that you may bask in its rays; the sea breeze blows for the disinterested encouragement of your appetite; the moon and stars are to look at while you smoke before "turning in." That the sea may lull and rock you to sleep is without doubt the final cause of its cradle-like movement, and the sufficient explanation of its soothing sound. You say to yourself as you sink to slumber that the ingenious Dr. Paley could not have anywhere found a more triumphant proof of his great doctrine of design in creation.

As to the spiritual, the intellectual, and even the moral regions of human life—well, at sea there are no such regions. They do not exist in human life. The talk about them which you remember to have heard on land, and to have believed in, had no solid basis in fact. It was a traveller's tale, the fable of some wonder-weaving explorer of the metaphysical ocean who has temporarily taken you in. You know better now. You know, for

instance, that the so-called "Session of 1893" was a mere "railway-journey nightmare," the result of a too copious meal too hastily devoured at Newcastle. We had found that out, every one of us, ere we had been twenty-four hours on board. One lost soul there was among us, it is true, who muttered strange words, which sounded like "Parish Councils Bill;" but we others, the saved, gazed upon him with compassion and without comprehension, and anon he faded away. So, too, it fared with those who had brought with them broken sentences of the language of some dreamland in which men talk, it would seem, about Realism, and Impressionism, and other plainly imaginary things; but these sufferers also were easily curable. Their malady soon yielded to the humane treatment of neglect, and they ceased to regard their illusions as realities. For illusions, of course, they are. There are, in reality, no such things as politics, or economics, or art, or literature, or science, or philanthropy, or in-

dust—particularly industry. There is no religion, except a vague form of Pantheism. There is no drama, save the one everlasting miracle play, which has the dawn for its Prologue, and morning, afternoon, evening, and night for its Acts. There are even no amusements—or none as the word and the thing are understood ashore. Sport and pastime no longer possess any traces of their terrene meaning. At sea there need not be, nor is there, any element in them which either promises excitement or pre-supposes skill. Otherwise, how could the most adventurous spirit derive full satisfaction, as it does, from *bélique* in the saloon, or the masculine intelligence find contentment in the imbecility of deck-quoits?

It is on the short voyage, the three, four, or five days' steam, as from one Mediterranean port to another, that these curious phenomena are most commonly to be remarked. The six or seven days' breathless run across the Atlantic in the "floating

palace" is, of course, another matter. There you can hardly be said to leave the habits, or even the appliances, of your daily life on land behind you, and the "City man" almost expects to find his daily paper every morning on the breakfast-table, if not a Stock Exchange in the smoking saloon. And on any longer voyages it is well known that another process of demoralisation sets in. After anything more than "a week of it" at sea the contented frivolity of the traveller, the vacuous repose of mind in which he has hitherto been lapped, give way in most cases to a feeling of acute unrest. The infinite bores him as much as ever, but the finite, at any rate in its more innocent forms, has ceased to distract. He has read his novel; the mild recreations of the deck interest him no longer; the regularly recurring summons to the groaning, and possibly rolling, board has lost its power to awaken a responsive thrill in his breast. It is more than probable that he is bilious; it is tolerably certain that

he is beginning to suffer from severe moral dyspepsia. In such a moment the traveller is thrown back, according to his or her sex, upon one or other of the two great—indeed, one may say the only two known—forms of relief from the irritating *ennui* of the sea voyage. He is driven to gambling, and she to quarrelling. Occasionally, it is true, the two pastimes are combined, or the former may lead by delightfully easy and natural stages to the latter. But, as a general rule, the two forms of distraction remain distinct in their character and incidents, although there is a certain superficial resemblance in their effects. Both of them exert a markedly centrifugal force. Gambling splits up the men into parties of four or more, according as they seek solace in whist or in “nap”; while quarrelling divides the women into smaller factions still. The process of disintegration, having once set in, advances with as terrible a rapidity as though Mr. Gladstone in person were the presiding genius of the

scene ; and before the end of the voyage the entire saloon is as deeply infected with the "virus of Particularism" as gallant little Wales itself.

To pick up a homeward-bound P. and O. at Gibraltar and to finish with her her journey to England is to assist at a truly melancholy drama of disenchantments. The deck is strewn with the fragments of lightly-made and lightly-broken eternal friendships and with the ashes of extinct flirtations. Bosoms which glowed with reciprocal passion in the Indian Ocean have cooled down in the Red Sea, and mutual admirations have given way to mutual criticism in the Suez Canal. But the short voyage allows no such scope for the display of this particular form of human weakness. It develops no worse characteristic than the somewhat fatuous form of complacent self-absorption which I have endeavoured to describe. And even this resolute refusal on the part of the average man to rise to the level of his

august surroundings may in itself, perhaps, be regarded as a tribute to their majesty. The mind may be only taking refuge in little things from the oppression of great ones, just as Charles Lamb had, he tells us, to counteract the awe-inspiring impression of the mountains in the Lake Country by "thinking of the ham and beef shop in Vinegar-yard." After all, too, Nature can better afford to put up with the indifference of man in this case than in almost any other; since there is no situation in which at her pleasure she can so easily compel his homage. Her skies have but to frown upon him, her sea has but to wrinkle its terrible brows, and puny man is at once recalled to a due sense of her awful presence. When that happens he more than makes up for his former irreverence; and happen it did to us some forty-eight hours before reaching our destination. We foolishly overtook a gale—an error inexcusable to so slow a boat—and from six o'clock of one night till about the

same hour on the following morning we did a good deal too much of Tennysonian "climbing up the climbing wave." Nature was then more than amply avenged upon those who had neglected to worship her in her gentler aspects. Many of them went, indeed, to the opposite extreme; for ere night fell they had exchanged their careless lounging postures for what it would be inadequate to describe as a mere attitude of worship. It was one of absolute prostration.

CHAPTER II

THE WONDERFUL DITCH

IN one of those rhetorical outbursts to which even the subject of sanitary engineering had power to provoke him, Victor Hugo once passionately exclaimed, "A sewer is a misunderstanding!" So acutely did he feel the estrangement which has arisen between men and those fertilising agents which he treats for the most part as mere nuisances instead of entertaining them as friends and allies. The analogy may at first sight seem a fanciful one, but the isthmus has always appeared to me to resemble the drainpipe, as being a misunderstanding—not, indeed, on the part of man, who does his best to remove it, but on that of Nature. For it divorces things

which seem obviously designed for union ; it separates and alienates natural forces which are striving for co-operation, and which come so near to fulfilling what strikes one as their obvious destiny that one cannot but resent the narrow barrier which alone stands between them and success. The isthmus which keeps two oceans from mingling their waters in one common highway of nations is a purely gratuitous obstacle. This you cannot say of the strait which sunders continents ; for straits are the boundary fences of states and races, and their existence makes for the individual security of peoples, and therefore for the peace of the world. Isolation is but a cheap price to pay for the blessing of even compulsory amity. If France, Italy, Germany, and Russia were suddenly converted by some cosmic catastrophe into four islands, the volume of international commerce might at first suffer some decrease, but how vast would be the compensation in internal wealth which would result from the

release of Continental industry from its overwhelming military burdens! Seas, however, have no quarrel with each other, and the isthmuses which sunder them in both hemispheres, to the diversion of human intercourse by many thousand miles of ocean from its shortest routes, are really mere obstructions, and nothing more. Nature began it, at any rate in the Eastern hemisphere. Her original idea, according to the geologist, was to divide Asia from Africa by a waterway, and not by an isthmus, and, probably, for a little matter of a few million ages, the Red Sea flowed amicably onwards past what is now the head of the Gulf of Suez, and met the waters of the Mediterranean in a fraternal embrace.

Unfortunately, however, at some remote geological period she changed her mind, set her gales and currents to work to sow strife between the two seas, and brought a northward-flowing stream on the one side in the teeth of southward-blowing winds on the

other. Neither would give way, and the inevitable result followed. The Red Sea began to throw up a sandbar; the Mediterranean, not to be behindhand, took to silting operations on its own account, and thus a barrier rose imperceptibly, grew and grew by infinitesimal degrees in height and breadth, was dried by the sun and blown by the desert winds into drifts, and piled up into dunes and sand-hills, until at last, in the creeping course of ages, it became the Isthmus of Suez—a closed door in the face of voyaging man seeking maritime transit between the Northern and Southern regions of the globe, and a door, moreover, which was to remain closed for all the innumerable æons by which the date of those fossil conchylia that the Red Sea has left on the shores of Lake Timsah is divided from that day in March, 1869, when the long-separated waters met again. From the spondylus of the protozoic periods to the late M. de Lesseps is a big jump; and perhaps no breach between two ancient com-

panions, which had lasted as long as this, was ever before so effectually healed.

Yet it is interesting to note how many and what persevering attempts have been made throughout all history to re-marry the divorced couple. In such a land of lakes and swamps and branching river arms as the Delta of the Nile it could hardly have been otherwise. Water communication, or the readiest facilities for establishing it, appeared everywhere except in the precise direction in which it was most wanted. Hence, from the time of the Pharaohs down to the Mohammedan conquest the dream of every active and capable Egyptian ruler has been to connect the two seas. The warrior kings of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties, the Setis and the Rameseses, laid the foundation of that ancient fresh-water canal system, which was extended by conqueror after conqueror, by Persians and Ptolemies, by Cæsars and Caliphs, and which only finally fell into utter disrepair in the eighth century of the Chris-

tian era, to remain neglected for over a thousand years, till it was restored by the famous French engineer as an operation subsidiary to his great work. For centuries before and after Christ, a chain of fresh-water canals and lakes had rendered water transit practicable from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the practicable was not often the practised. Trade in all ages of the world has been obstinate in its preferences, and neither Pharaohs nor Ptolemies nor Cæsars ever succeeded in turning it into the devious waterways which had been constructed for it. The Roman imports from the East reached the Queen city of the world by another route. Her Indian argosies touched at ports on the Western Coast of the Red Sea—at Koser, for instance, where the eastward-bending Nile touches its nearest point to those waters—and their unladen cargoes were conveyed by the great caravan route to Coptos, and re-embarked in boats on the great river for Alexandria, whence they were reshipped for their

ultimate destination. The Mohammedan conquerors of Egypt tinkered, like their fore-runners, with the ancient fresh-water canal system ; and Amr Ibn-el-Asi used it for the transport of grain from his newly-founded Fostat—the Cairo of later times—to Suez, *en route* for Arabia ; but under the Abbassides it fell into complete disuse. Venice, again, hankered, as might be expected, after a short cut through the isthmus to that gorgeous East which she “held in fee” ; but she, too, followed her predecessors to decay without having done anything to realise her idea ; while, unfortunately, the latest successor of Venice as the great trading State of the world allowed political apprehensions to chill her ancient spirit of commercial enterprise, and held aloof from that great project of re-uniting the two seas from which she has been so incomparably the greatest gainer, both in wealth and power.

To an Englishman who steams for the first time between the two-mile long breakwaters

that protect the harbour of Port Said from the mud-laden current that would otherwise soon block its mouth, it is difficult to repress a pang of patriotic regret that England—the modern Rome—let slip the chance of adding this more than Roman work to the roll of her great engineering exploits. We, who have spanned continents and bridged oceans, should never have left it to any man of another race to cleave a way through the few score miles of isthmus which had so long obstructed the intercourse of the Eastern with the Western world. There is nothing very imposing, it is true, in that polgylot port—that unspeakable *sentina gentium*—that meeting-place of every race and every vice which plays janitrix of this Mediterranean gateway. But when a mansion is as spacious and as splendid as that which lies at the end of the passage, who cares about the private morals of the concierge? Say that Port Said is a sordid little Monte Carlo, doubled with a squalid little Corinth: say that it is a nest of silver

hells and sailors' bagnios, and what matters? In a few hours we shall have discharged our Egyptian consignments, and taken our India-bound cargo, and away we shall have steamed southward into that curious maritime ditch that has been dug in the desert to correct the "second thoughts" of Nature ill-inspired, and to reconstitute the conditions of an infinitely distant geological past.

And what a wonderful ditch it is! More wonderful, perhaps, than ever now that, thanks to the ingenuities of modern science, it is navigable by night as well as by day. Before the age of electricity, the on-coming of darkness meant the arrest of navigation, and the canal after nightfall was tenanted only by moored and motionless ships. But now, with the dazzling rays of the search-light streaming from our bows, and throwing its broad, fan-shaped patch of radiance on the dark waters ahead of us, we can steam steadily on. Five miles an hour is not exactly what you would call good running

for a large steamer, but it is better than absolute rest—for those, at least, who want to reach their journey's end ; and if you were only sure of being able to keep it up you would be in a position to make a fairly accurate guess at the time at which you will reach your destination at Ismailia. This, however, is just what you cannot do ; and it is the impossibility of doing it that lends so “sporting” an interest to the Egypt-bound travellers' passage through the Canal. Facts on board ship are always hard to come by, and the earnest seeker after truth as regards the vessel's movements, dates of arrival, hours of departure, and so forth, is usually led to the conclusion that the object of his search is to be found nowhere but in the bosom of the captain—if there ; a circumstance, however, which does not in any degree check the confident circulation of statements varying through every degree of inaccuracy on the authority of the more “knowing” among the passengers. But this is a case in

which not even the experienced and obliging commander of the P. and O. steamship *Sumatra* can give us any precise information as to when we shall find ourselves at the goal of our voyage. It will not be before the small hours of the morning, of that we may assure ourselves; but exactly how small they will be he cannot say. A new day will have come to the birth before we arrive, so much is certain; but the age which the new-born babe will have attained on our arrival cannot be precisely fixed. It may be a miserable, purblind, chilly infant of two or three, or a stouter, healthier brat of five, or, best of all, a rosy, sun-warmed child of eight. All depends on our luck, and our orders from the stations on the bank.

“Do you see that coloured light?” said the captain, pointing to a signal some way ahead of us. “That means that ships from the North are to hold on their course, and ships from the South to ‘tie up.’ We shall

pass one in a few minutes. Do you see her search-light?"

At this distance it looks a mere mass of silver haze; but it grows sharper and clearer as we approach, and in a little while we can make out the dim outline of the great ship that carries it. Higher and higher she seems to rise as we approach, and her squat funnels begin to shape themselves in the luminous mist. Another minute or two and we are alongside; and, though the *Sumatra* is assuredly no cock-boat, the ship we are passing seems to tower above us, a huge black wall with motionless figures gazing at us over its battlements. Inquisitive passengers hail these apparitions from our side with inquiries as to name and nationality of the vessel, but they vouchsafe no reply. Again and again the question is repeated, but still no answer. This is absurd, since everybody understands the English language; it even seems uncanny. Not a sound comes from them, not a limb stirs, not a footfall is heard

on her decks as we glide past this looming bastion, and exchange its utter blackness for the grey surface of the canal bank. For all that appears she might be the phantom ship that the Ancient Mariner saw, the ship of "the nightmare Death-in-Life, that thickens men's blood with cold." As a matter of fact, she is a French transport returning with troops from Madagascar.

If she looked spectral in the weird half-light around us, it is only because every other object which we are passing has a phantasmal air. The patch of illuminated water before our bows is as bright as day; but the buoys which lie outside this luminous arc slip past us like a grey procession of ghosts, the banks are as shadowy as the shores of Styx itself, and the desert stretches away on either side vast and silent, like the "empty kingdoms of Dis." It would scarcely surprise one to see Charon pulling across our wake with a boatload of strengthless shades. The ferryman and his freight would hardly

seem more unearthly than the whole scene. As we creep thus leisurely onward the sound of our engines has become little more than an audible murmur. No faintest echo of man or animal reaches us from either shore. The silence is unbroken save by the occasional clang of the electric signal bell from the bridge and the sleepy lapping of the water about our bows. The endless train of buoys filing dimly past us on the waters, the canal banks drifting by in grey monotony, begin at last to affect the senses like the reiterated cadence of a song. They lull your brain by degrees, especially at midnight, into a sort of half-waking slumber, in which you seem to be sailing dream-like through a world of dreams, till at last you might almost believe that the mysterious channel itself which you are navigating is still the vision that it was to the Pharaoh of 3000 years ago, and to Persian and to Greek, to Roman and to Arab since his day, and that M. Ferdinand de Lesseps never appeared among the sons

of men to build up a reputation in one isthmus and to wreck it in another.

But it is our turn to "tie up" and give the northward-bound ships a chance, and to tie up may mean a wait of any length from half an hour to thrice that time. With so much more of the canal still to be traversed before we reach our destination a tying up of the steamer justifies the turning in of the passenger. We have still four or five good hours before us ere we bring to in Lake Timsah, and the steam tender bears us across its waters in the grey of the morning towards "the haven where we would be."

CHAPTER III

THE STREETS OF CAIRO

AMONG those who have seen many Oriental cities there is controversy as to which of them most conspicuously embodies the characteristics of the East. Some lay claim to have found in Syria, others in Persia, and yet others in India the type in question ; yet one cannot help suspecting that if a vote were taken upon a sort of *scrutin de liste* of all the more famous capitals and great towns of Asia and Northern Africa, Cairo would win the first place among cities, as Themistocles won it among Athenian commanders. Everybody, that is to say, after putting his own special favourite first, would put Cairo second. The colour and movement and perpetual play of light and shade on an ever-shifting

mass of hues, that kaleidoscope of humanity which the ordinary every-day traffic of the Egyptian capital keeps twirling before the eyes must be bad to beat. Even here, on this hotel terrace, bathed in the morning glory of that peculiarly liquid sunshine which is almost a speciality of Egypt—even here, in front of Shepheard's, where the West is ever busily dashing its sombre blacks and sober greys on the glowing palette of the East, the effect is almost bewildering. But the coat and boots and billycock of the European, with their suggestions of the incongruous and the over-civilised and the unpicturesque, are easily got rid of. That is the charm of Cairo. You step aside from one of the main thoroughfares, crowded with Western vehicles of every description, from the drag to a pony trap, and in an instant you are at once in a maze of alleys, where no draught animal of any kind has ever set foot since the houses were built on either side, and through which you may thread your way, surrounded by the same

moving masses of colour for as many hours as you please without emerging again into Western civilisation.

Lost, in every sense of the word, geographically as well as imaginatively—for there is no city, not even Venice, where you can become hopelessly *désorienté* with so little trouble—you wander on amid the restlessly flowing stream of swarthy turbaned faces and lithe white-and-blue robed figures, your ears filled with the strange cries and your senses intoxicated with the nameless odours of the East. Further and further you ramble, and deeper and deeper plunge into this magic labyrinth of winding ways. The alleys seem to narrow more and more every minute until the rich brown profusely-carven woodwork of the jutting gables on either side of the roadway almost threatens to meet and blot out the strip of burning blue above your head. As the street straitens the crowd appears to thicken, until at the moment when the one is at its narrowest and the other at

its densest you step out into a little square in which the blaze of colour and the play of movement reach their height. You are in the carpet bazaar of Cairo—the spot at which the many-coloured throng around you finds its most gorgeous background. Carpets of every hue and web—Tunisian, Algerian, Smyrniote, Persian—drape the whole quadrangle with an arras worthy of a Sultan's seraglio. To think in "cold blood," and out of sight of it, of such a picture in such a frame would be to conjure up a vision of crude and garish magnificence at which the eye would ache and the taste revolt. But the East is an artist of unerring though unstudied skill, and every patch of brilliant and violently contrasted colour that it seems to have flung so recklessly together has fallen as by a divinely pre-established harmony into its proper and most effective place. And Nature herself, in compounding the pigments for these swarthy skins, has entered into a decorative conspiracy with man. Con-

sidered merely as an arrangement in browns, the faces of a Cairene crowd are a study in themselves. Between the light *café-au-lait* colour of the half-Westernised Levantine and the blue-black negroid from Abyssinia or the Soudan, there are well-nigh half a dozen different shades distinguishable to the attentive eye. The *café-au-lait* changes to chocolate, the chocolate to a kind of *café noir*, the kind that you complain of on grounds of defective strength; and this, again, to the kind that you complain of on the strength of excessive grounds. Then comes the lustreless jet, as of the unpolished boot; and then—last and lowest note of the gamut, the lower C, so to speak, in the descending scale of colour—comes that deep glossy ebony which might drive all the blacking manufacturers in the world to the despairing confession that, whatever a certain fashionable paradoxist of the day may say to the contrary, Nature is, here, at any rate, superior to art. It is from this point, however, that

the artist, conscious or unconscious, takes his start, and there is simply no limit to the varied effects that he can produce with this army of browns on the one hand, and, on the other, every shade of yellow, from the deepest orange to the palest primrose, open to him for his turban, and for his body-garment every gradation of colour that divides "forget-me-not" from "navy" blue. White, I suppose, is, take it all round, the prevailing mode both for head-dress and robe; but for the latter blue is also "much worn," as the fashion-books say, and the variety of colour-schemes obtained by combining its varying values with every imaginable shade of brown in the face and of yellow and red in the turbans is inexhaustible and a source of ever-new delight.

But, after all, this whirlpool of colour furnishes only one element in Cairo's complex charm. It is a charm of endless contrast, not chromatic alone—of contrasts of race, features, form, costume, attitude, occupation,

movement, mood ; of everything, in short, which belongs to man and man's surroundings. This it is that makes the magic of the marvellous Eastern city for the Western eye. Splendour and squalor, the gracious and the hideous, stolidity and vivacity, dignity and frivolity, conflict and intermingle at every step. The mere confusion of races in its streets would be enough to bemuse the newly-arrived traveller. Gibraltar itself is beaten by it as a *sentina gentium* ; nothing beats it that I have ever known or heard of, except Port Said. It is a perfect salad of nationalities, and a salad mixed by that "madman" who, according to the old recipe, should stir the bowl after the miser has added the vinegar and the spendthrift the oil. The babel of languages is positively Pentecostal. Parthians and Medes, Greeks and Arabians, dwellers in Mesopotamia and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, are all represented here, and if the miracle of the first Whit Sunday were to repeat itself, the

audience assembled here would be fully as well qualified to appreciate it as its original witnesses. Nor is the medley of manners less striking than the hotch-potch of races and the tangle of tongues. The Oriental of popular Western conception is grave and dignified of aspect, tall of stature, stately of gait, slow of speech and movement, calm and impassive of temperament; and popular Western conception is not wrong. The Oriental is all these things—and their opposites. In one form of him he treads the roadway with the majesty of Haroun Alraschid; in another he scampers through the streets like a Parisian *gamin*. Here his utterance is as measured, his manual actions as restrained as those of an English judge pronouncing a capital sentence; there, just across the street, he is as full of jabber and gesture as a Neapolitan lazzarone. The features of that venerable merchant who has pipes to sell are as absolutely unemotional as a Red Indian's; but if the purchaser who is

haggling with him for the abatement of a piastre were pleading for the life of his only child the passionately suppliant expression of his countenance would more than satisfy the dramatic requirements of the situation. The East and the South, in short, join hands at this longitude and latitude with a singular effect, as of the contact of two extremes ; and man, paradoxical as it may sound, is here both a more reserved and a more demonstrative animal than he is in the North and West.

One may ramble, however, through the streets of Cairo for an hour at a time without finding very many opportunities for comparing the Eastern and Western types. Choose well your region and your hour, and you will find few Englishmen at the bazaars, and, indeed, few European costumes at all, save those which here and there incongruously clothe some Levantine trader of race too obvious to need the confession of his scarlet fez. As you slowly make your way back to

your hotel, conducted, as you will inevitably have to be were you the most inspired of topographers, by an improvised native guide, you will pass unvaryingly, at any rate until you hit off the Muski or the Boulevard Mehemet Ali, through the same burnoused and turbaned crowd that has surrounded you from the first. Yet no! If you are fortunate you may, just at the moment when the tide of Oriental life is at its full, come across one crowning contrast, one final shock of piquant opposites, one topmost culmination and apex of the pyramid of picturesque contrarieties which has been accumulating, layer by layer, during your walk. Has that piece of good fortune befallen you? Yes, it has.

Look down this narrow alley. Let your eye thread its way through the seething, jostling, rainbow-coloured multitude that streams along it; past the water-carrier, with his bellied skin-wallet slung across his shoulders, and his metal cups jingling musically to the cry of his trade; past the camel-rider,

swaying on his ungainly beast; past the group of chattering loungers outside the cross-legged, gravely-smoking slipper-seller's stall: and what is that apparition which has just turned the corner from the main street, and is now advancing slowly towards you along that narrow strip of blinding sunlight in the middle of the road? What is that figure, which completes the scheme of colour with one vivid blot of scarlet and another of white, and puts the last dramatic touch to the contrast of East and West? The scarlet blot is the uniform coat of the British linesman; the white blot is the pith pickelhaube of the same; and the whole apparition is that of Private Thomas Atkins, of the 115th, or South-West Wurzelshire Regiment, sedately taking the air on a donkey! To see him jigging rhythmically towards you, the sole visible representative of Western civilisation, the one bright "Occidental Star"—to borrow the description of Queen Elizabeth from the Preface to the Prayer Book—amid

this enveloping cloud of Orientals, is to feel oneself confronted with the strangest possible combination of the humanly comic and the historically impressive.

He is a trifle short, is Tommy, and his stature is not increased to the eye by the surmounting pickelhaube, which looks, as no doubt it must look if it is fully to serve its purpose, several sizes too large for its wearer. But he carries himself well, and he could not bestride his charger with more resolute dignity if the charger were Copenhagen and he the Iron Duke. Behind him trots the donkey-boy, rending the air with friendly yells, and dividing his copper visage with a grin which shows his entire four-octave keyboard of dazzling white teeth, while jocular exclamations in Arabic assail the rider's ears from every side. But in comparison with the stony immobility of Atkins's countenance the expression of the Sphinx is one of shy and uneasy self-consciousness. No sign of animation, no evidence even of any perception of surround-

ing objects ; nay, no hint of any acknowledgment of a community of human nature with the living beings among whom he is passing is visible in any feature of his face until he is abreast of his countryman. Then for one brief moment the wooden lineaments relax, the eye is cast towards you with a momentary flash of recognition, the cockney *nez retroussé* receives an almost imperceptible upward jerk, a faint smile flickers on the lips for a moment, to be immediately afterwards suppressed as a weakness not to be indulged in before the barbarian, and the gallant fellow turns the corner of the street and disappears from view. He was here and he has gone ! The vision of the red coat and white helmet has passed before the eyes and vanished as fleetingly as a dream. The English uniform has flitted for a moment across the scene, like a streak of stormy sunlight across a swollen river ; has flitted and flashed away, and the eternal tide of Oriental life flows on.

O, Thomas ! is it an allegory—an “alle-

gory on the banks of the Nile?" Dost thou, the symbol of British conquest in thy military attire, symbolise also in the swiftness of thy transit its brief duration? Four of the world's conquerors have already swept over this hoary land and are gone. Persian and Macedonian, and Roman and Arab—they have all passed, like the bird or the arrow of Ecclesiastes, behind whose flight the air closes, so that no man can tell of its passage. Their records remain, as all things remain in this country of the imperishable; but the traces of their power in anything more human or vital than graven granite or moulded clay might be sought in vain. The conquests which create peoples, the wars which sow the seeds of States are here unknown. Master after master of Egypt has come as a conqueror; and as conquerors always, and as nation-builders never, the dynasties founded by them have ruled and have disappeared, the fruits of their victories perishing with them, and the mere tradition

of their triumphs alone remaining. Where are the hoof-prints of Cambyses, and of Alexander, of Cæsar and of Omar? Can it be, O Thomas, that thy donkey, even thine, makes tracks as fleeting as the chargers of those mighty warriors, and that thy sojourn here is destined, like theirs and their descendants', to be remembered but as a mere brief episode in the history of this strange monumental people, who still look forth upon the traveller with the self-same eyes and faces that confront him from their sculptured tombs?

CHAPTER IV

TOMMY'S EGYPTIAN CHRISTMAS

OUR Christmas pudding, like our morning drum, rolls round the globe, and the British soldier keeps the great national festival in many a remote and unfamiliar region in every zone. But nowhere, perhaps, is it celebrated among stranger surroundings than environ one on the dusty parade-ground where the troops of our Cairo garrison are assembled for their Christmas sports. Could the great Saracen prince who built the Citadel only leave his green-scarfed houris for a couple of hours to revisit it, what would he think of the scene before his eyes? Saladin, it is true, would find an old acquaintance in the English infidel. He and we gave and took hard knocks in Palestine

700 years ago; but perhaps his recollections of Plantagenet knights and cross-bowmen would hardly assist him to recognise their successors in the persons of Tommy Atkins and his officers. Nor would he be aided in this recognition by an observation of the particular form of activity in which, as we drive under the massive archway of the Citadel and enter the barrack-square, surrounded by a crowd of blue-gowned, grinning, gesticulating Arabs, who are probably not much altered in appearance from the Cairene donkey-boys of the days of the last Fatimite Caliphs, a row of broad-faced, bullet-headed British soldiers, each one of them planted firmly on the back of an unwillingly participating steed, is contending for the prize of victory. It is the second event in the day's programme—the "tug-of-war on donkeys"—and a long and indecisive event it proves. It might be war on the old system, with both of the armies withdrawn into winter quarters, so immovable are the

two forces, and so uneventful the situation. Both sides pull till their joints crack, but neither produces the least effect upon the other. Nor does either receive the slightest assistance from their own animals, or encounter any resistance, save that of inertia, from those of their opponents. Each stands motionless, inconvenienced by both belligerents but aiding neither, a perfect type of the conscientious neutral; and as eight men cannot be expected, without some very commanding superiority in weight and strength, to drag along an equal number of their comrades plus eight donkeys, and at the same time to kick or otherwise persuade eight other profoundly unsympathetic asses into rendering their assistance, the contest naturally ends in a draw, both sides retiring with equal honour from the field.

The "Officers' Mule Race" would no doubt have been less surprising to our Saracenic *revenant*, who would naturally assume that the descendants of the Crusaders must

know how to ride, though he might not expect to find them as much at home on a barebacked courser as his own wild horsemen of the desert. He would be puzzled, again, however, by the "Children's Handicap," one of the prettiest events of the day, with its dozen or so of small competitors dashing off at the word of the starter, and the fair-haired, delicate-featured officer's child running neck-and-neck with the sturdy progeny of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Atkins for a prize of thirty piastres, or a little more than six silver shillings. And, above all, what would Saladin, the son of Yussuf, have said to the boot-race, with its strange and onerous conditions? "Boots," he would have read, or his interpreter would have read to him from his programme—"Boots to be taken off at starting-post, placed in a heap fifty yards off, race to heap, competitors to pick out their own boots, and the first to return to starter with boots fully laced up to win." Severe as is this trial of the qualities of fleetness of the

foot, quickness of eye, dexterity of hand, and a nice discrimination in boots, it is made yet more arduous by the exertions of the stewards, who mix the boots of the competitors with all the care of a croupier shuffling a pack of cards. At last the operation is completed, the bootless antagonists withdraw to the starting-place, and toe the line with their stocking-soled feet. The word is given, and they are off. The fifty yards are soon cleared and in another moment they fall headlong, hands and knees, upon the heap, a pushing, jostling, hustling mass, while the dust rises in a dense cloud, shoulder high, around them, and, above their heads—since the next best thing to finding your own boots is to throw those of your rivals to as great a distance as possible—the upper air is black with boots. After a minute or two of wild confusion, some half-dozen of the competitors burst breathless from the struggling crowd, each with a pair of boots, his own or another's, held high in air. One flings himself down at

the very outskirts of the *melée*; another hurries to a distance—freedom from interruption seeming to him worth securing, even at the expense of lost ground. Dusty feet are thrust with furious haste into boots, themselves already half filled with dust by facetious hands; nervous fingers pluck at the laces; then one man leaps to his feet and rushes for the goal. In another moment a second is in pursuit of him, a slower lacer, but a faster racer, and the two breast the handkerchief almost side by side.

Other “events” as interesting, but certainly no less bewildering to the shade of his Highness the Caliph, succeed the boot-race. Infidel non-commissioned officers, each holding between his teeth a spoon with an egg balanced in its bowl, career cautiously over a fifty yards course for a prize of a turkey and a pair of chickens to him who shall reach the goal with his fragile charge unbroken. Then privates, mounted on donkeys for a wrestling match, proceed to show, as Napier says of

their forefathers on the terrible field of Albuera, "with what majesty the British soldier fights." With little, it must be owned, of the science that the Arab equestrian wrestler displays, they tear the shirts off each other's back in the fury of their grapple, finishing, as a rule, in about sixty seconds or so a bout which a couple of native donkey-boys would have artistically prolonged for at least five minutes. In the meanwhile Arabs, narrowly watched by a British soldier or two told off to see that play does not become earnest, tackle each other at quarter-staff, to the profit of a veteran "gamester" of sixty years, *bien sonnés*, who simply does what he likes with every opponent that steps into the ring. It would have been a graceful compliment to the founder of the Citadel if the feat named after him—that of cleaving a floating veil in twain with a sword—had been exhibited, as it not infrequently is in English military games, by some trooper of our Egyptian contingent of cavalry. This, at any rate, the Caliph would have

understood and appreciated. Unfortunately it is not in the programme.

But what is this which follows? Surely a contest still more familiar to him by report, at any rate, if not from actual experience, than any other. O Saladin! it is a tournament—a joust such as your spies may have brought you word of from the camp of the Crusaders before Acre and elsewhere in the lands overrun by their unbelieving hosts. A tournament, did I say? Nay, it is an “Ivanhoe Tournament,” a passage of arms like that in which, though their names are recorded in no historic chronicle, knights as real as any you ever fought with took such gallant part. Hark! the note of the bugle! Will Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert come pricking forth into the lists with lance uplifted? Or will El Desdichado, the Disinherited Knight, appear amid a blare of trumpets at the far end of the barrack-square? No; there are other and more modern jousts. They are Sir Thomas de Blanchefarine and Sir Atkyn Le

Ramoneur, one armed with a floury, the other with a sooty mop. At sound of bugle they lay besom in rest and, charging, meet in deadly shock in the centre of the tilt-yard. The gallant steeds bestridden by them, animals of a strangely human expression of countenance, who might easily be mistaken for two of their riders' comrades, are not exactly "thrown upon their haunches by the concussion," as was usual with the chargers of Saladin's day; but they certainly remain erect on their hind legs during the whole encounter, engaged, apparently, in an extremely animated, though not unfriendly, conversation. As to their riders, each of them has attempted that most ambitious, but, if successful, most effective coup of the tourney, which consists in aiming, not at the shield or body of an adversary, but at his head; and each has hit his mark. The dark features of Le Ramoneur are sicklied o'er with the pale cast of flour, and the candid countenance of De Blanchefarine has received

a rich coating of lampblack. The two knights separate, and having with difficulty forced their steeds a few yards apart, they clash again and yet again, until at last the black champion, who has indeed by this time almost changed places with the white knight, is borne to the earth.

Let us dismiss the phantom of Saladin to his Moslem Paradise, and wander away from this scene of the British soldier's harmless high jinks on a quest of our own. The spot is full of associations which, though much more recent, are almost as grotesquely incongruous with this Yuletide horseplay of the nineteenth century as are those of the First Crusade. For the Citadel of Cairo is overshadowed by the sombre memories of Mohammed Ali, the last of the warlike Princes of Egypt, the statesman and soldier who, assisted by the military abilities of his adopted son, Ibrahim, might, but for the intervention of the Great Powers, have shaken down the tottering throne of the House of

Othman fifty years ago, and have founded a new dynasty of his own upon the ruins. Not many yards from here rises the magnificent mosque which bears his name, and uprears the two exquisitely graceful minarets which form a landmark visible for many miles to the traveller in the desert. Within its walls, rich with shafted alabaster, lie Mohammed Ali's remains, and he built and dedicated it, the grim old satrap, on the very scene of the most ruthless and most treacherous massacre by which any ruler ever swept political enemies from his path. It was here on this height—or, rather, in the narrow way, with a high wall, which leads to it through the Bab-el-Azab—that the wretched Mamelukes and their followers, to the number of 450, lured thither by a pretended offer of hospitality, were slaughtered in huddled heaps by the soldiery of the Pasha in 1811, one only escaping, who had refused to enter the narrow way, and had cleared one of the walls of the courtyard on horseback, alighting on the steep

slope outside. They still point you out the corner of the enclosure at which this desperate leap for life was taken, and from it, if the stately edifice which surrounds the body of Mohammed Ali were removed, you could pitch a pebble on to his tomb. So near to the death-place of the great company of his murdered victims did the slayer of the Mamelukes choose his last resting-place, nothing doubting, I daresay, of his own place in Paradise.

They had none of our weak Western misgivings on the subject of necessary, or what they deemed unnecessary, bloodshed, those Oriental princes of the old school, and none assuredly troubled the repose of Mohammed Ali. At the opening of the overland route to the East and South, a few years before the close of the Pasha's long life, a now aged Englishman passed through Egypt, among the first batch of travellers returning from one of our Australasian colonies. He and his companions were royally entertained at

Cairo, and, among other attentions, he was admitted to view his host's bed-chamber. Its severe simplicity was relieved by but one mural decoration—a picture. It was a portrait of the single Mameluke who had escaped him. The sole memento of that ancient crime, now more than thirty years behind him, which Mohammed Ali cared to cherish, was one which would serve to remind him, for precaution's sake, of the features of his one surviving enemy.

But the sports are over. The turbaned spectators are trooping down the hill to the town, and Tommy Atkins is betaking himself to barracks after a Christmas Day spent much better, thanks to the kindly forethought of his officers, than in fortifying himself with strong liquors against the gentle melancholy naturally engendered by a Christmas celebrated in exile. Tea is awaiting us in the hospitable messroom of the Citadel, and from its windows, which command an unrivalled view of this pearl of Eastern cities, we can

watch the countless domes and minarets of Cairo, now all suffused with the golden haze of sunset, grow gradually clearer and sharper in that intense olive green gloaming which melts so gradually into the magical Egyptian night.

CHAPTER V

THE FATHER OF TERROR

WHEN that amiable amateur coachman, Count R., who drives the four-horse drag daily from Cairo to the Pyramids for sheer love of the art, assures the passengers who mount beside and behind him in a blazing sun, that they will need no umbrella or parasol, inasmuch as "the road is shaded all the way," they are apt on the first impulse to suspect that the statement is one of those expressions of affectionate partiality which require a strong dash of seasoning from the salt-cellar of scepticism. To drive for ten or a dozen miles along a public highway, and to be protected from the rays of the sun throughout the whole route is a blessing not often vouchsafed to travellers in a dry and thirsty land.

The world is not built that way, as a rule, and it is not easy to believe that it is so constructed between Cairo and Ghizeh. It turns out, however, that the pleasing assurance of our charioteer is a good deal nearer the literal truth than such assurances usually manage to get. Perhaps the grain of salt is wanted, but it is a very small one. In the town itself we have the protecting walls of the houses with an occasional strip of boulevard-planted avenue where the street is too wide to afford us mural shade; and, once through the Kasr-en-Nil and out of Cairo by the great Nile Bridge, we do in very truth enter what, without material exaggeration, might be called a continuous covered way.

For miles before us the road to Ghizeh lies straight and white between two almost unbroken lines of acacia-like *lebbek* trees, through whose embowering shade the sunbeams filter diluted when they penetrate at all. A light wind, too, is abroad, enough to refresh without stirring too much of the

easily-raised and almost impalpable dust ; and the air and scene together breathe an exhilaration which even the notes of the guard's horn are powerless to dash. For we have a guard, and our guard has a horn, and both guard and horn, as might be expected in the turn-out of the agreeable Anglo-maniac who is coaching us, are all that the most exacting orthodoxy of the English road could require, in every respect save one. The result of the combined, yet not always concerted efforts of guard and horn to produce music leaves something to be desired. This, however, is a matter not easy to provide for even in England, where indeed, one often hears less harmonious strains than are just now being wafted on the breeze. There is, perhaps, no musical performer in the world who has more need than the average post-horn player to entreat his audience, in the terms in which a newly-elected Speaker of the House of Commons approaches the Crown or its representative Commission, to "place the most

favourable construction on all his acts." To demand a pedantic accuracy of musical phrasing in the cheerful flourishes with which a guard is accustomed to herald the arrival of the coach would be to fail in reasonable indulgence for human shortcomings. It is probable that unless the will of the performer were liberally accepted as equivalent to the deed, and his good intentions treated as atoning for a proportion of not less than three or four flat notes out of every half-dozen, the art of playing a post-horn from the top of a mail-coach would speedily become extinct.

Inspired by the stimulating sound of this manly struggle with difficulties we speed along. Cairo fades behind us into a mere picturesquely-broken mass of houses, dominated to the last by the two exquisite minarets of the Mosque of Mohammed Ali. A few more miles and you catch your first glimpse of the Pyramids—a disappointing one, as first glimpses of all great objects, except

certain mountains from a distance, usually are ; and, finally, after a drive of about an hour and a quarter from Cairo you pull up before the pleasant terrace of the Mena House Hotel, with the world-famed Pyramid of Cheops—all but the oldest, as it is quite the vastest of those great sepulchres—a few hundred yards from the spot at which you alight. Yet, now that you have reached it, the chances are that it is not this huge structure which first arrests your gaze. Unless, indeed, you are a fanatical Egyptologist first, and a Nature worshipper afterwards, it is upon the landscape you have left behind, and not on that in front of you that your eye will be fixed. Assuredly will this be so with any one who here for the first time makes acquaintance with that most delightful of earthly sights—the yellow desert marching league on league with the river-belt of vivid green. Far as the eye can travel stretches out that union of the living and the dead—the arid Libyan wilderness, its parched and stony

levels broken here and there by the low rolling billows of the sandhills and bounded only by the western horizon, and side by side with it along the river-marge that broad bright strip of verdure chequered everywhere with rich brown patches of fresh-sown soil, the priceless gift of Nilus to the children of his banks.

Indescribable in words as is the glow and glare of the desert which, grey on the skyline and yellow in the middle distance, seems in the foreground almost incandescent under the pitiless sunblaze, it is hardly easier to do descriptive justice to the charm and refreshment of its cultivated fringe. A native of our own moist islands would naturally be fastidious, one might think, as a connoisseur of verdure, and would hardly expect to find within a few score miles of the tropics a successful rival of the beauty of an English field in April. Yet never and nowhere, not even in the rainiest spring of rainy Ireland, could you match the deep, cool, glossy green of

these Nile-watered meadows, from which the bare red-brown stems of the palm trees, hardly elsewhere visible, save with their roots embedded in sandy, sterile-looking soil, uplift themselves into the golden air. Is there any other region in the world in which fertility so sweet and gracious and barrenness so fierce and forbidding can be so instantaneously exchanged? On the right, within a stone's-throw of where you stand, lie the boundless reaches of the Libyan Desert—a land inhospitable and accursed for unnumbered ages and unexplored by all-subduing man even to the present day. To the left this rich selvage of prolific soil, which the waters of the Nile have for as many recurring seasons strewn upon its shores. What wonder that so ancient a benefactor of mortals should have been worshipped as a god?

There can be very little that has been left unsaid about anything in Egypt, and least of all about that most wondrous of its many wonders, the Great Pyramid. The Titanic

tomb which rises, dominating its fellows, from this range of low sandhills has for so many thousand years aroused the awe of mankind that the faculty of human speech and the resources of human imagination have had a considerable time to exercise and exhaust themselves upon it. That justice has still to be done to it in spite of all these efforts, and that probably such justice never will be done to it, is not surprising. For, after all, how should it have been; how should it ever be possible for description to deal adequately with an object possessing two characteristics which overshadow all the rest, and of which one eludes the eye and the other paralyses the imagination? Size too huge to be visually measured; age too vast to be mentally realised; that is the Pyramid of Cheops. It is discernible so far off that, as has been said already, the first glimpse of it disappoints the beholder with an appearance of insignificance, while when you are close to it the absence of any standard of

comparison disables you from appreciating its dimensions. You perceive, of course, that it is considerably bigger than its two adjacent companions ; but then how big are its two companions ? They also are set in this sandy desert with no building on the same level to dwarf with their stature.

To be sure, it is open to you to adopt the desperate expedient of climbing the Great Pyramid. There are more, many more, Arabs ready to help you up its face for a consideration than you "have any use for." This method, however, like a drawn battle between two brave enemies, is heroic, but inconclusive. The "personal equation" comes in to impair its validity in a quadruple form ; in the "form," first, of the traveller himself, which varies considerably as between one traveller and another ; and secondly, thirdly, and fourthly, in the form of the three Arabs, who—one on your right hand, the other on your left, and their companion using the peculiar means described in the outspoken

title of a once famous tract by the eminent Nonconformist divine, Richard Baxter—together hale or propel you up the flight of yard-high steps by which you gain the apex of the Pyramid.

The exactitude of this method of computation is gravely impaired by the introduction of these four indeterminates; for there is certainly many a traveller to whom the mere fact that the ascent of the Pyramid of Cheops has exhausted him and “pumped” three Arabs would afford no solid ground for the inference that it is one of the wonders of the world. Figures help us no better. What is the use of knowing, as a bare proposition of linear measurement, that the Great Pyramid is 451 feet high, and that each of its sides is 250 yards long at its base? There is just as little use in it, as there is in any of those ingenious comparisons with domestic (and now therefore distant) objects, whereby people attempt to bring the proportions of this mighty sepulchre within the grasp of their

imaginations. It may well be, as they tell us, that the Great Pyramid would fill Lincoln's Inn Fields, and that its apex would tower above the cross of St. Paul's. But this, alas, is not Lincoln's Inn Fields, nor are we now surveying the summit of our great metropolitan cathedral from the top of Ludgate Hill; and to fancy ourselves on the steps of the College of Surgeons, or facing the statue of Queen Anne, is surely an imaginative effort no less difficult than that which it is supposed to facilitate.

As to the age of the Pyramid, it is no more possible to conceive of that than it is to realise its size. We may flatter ourselves that we do so when we are mechanically repeating as the result of the latest and most authoritative computations of Egyptologists that Cheops flourished about 3733 B.C., or some 5627 years ago. But it is in fact a mere idle form of words. We simply lose our mental way in these enormous tracts of time, as we should lose our geographical way in

the illimitable spaces of the desert. The periods of which we have any record in our own or in European history are all too ludicrously short for comparison. Eighteen times as long a period as divides us from the birth of Shakespeare; fourteen times as long as the New World has existed for the Old. What measure of the awful age of these monuments do we get from such comparisons? Or, again, a good deal of water has flowed through the valley of the Thames since Cæsar crossed it at the head of his legions; yet the distance which we have to look back to descry the first historic conqueror of our islands through the haze of the ages is but one-third of the distance which would have had to be imaginatively spanned by Cæsar himself if the conqueror of Ptolemaic Egypt had striven to recall the builder of the Great Pyramid. The 800 years during which that infinitely complex, tremulously nervous, exquisitely refined organism which we call modern England has evolved itself

from the almost protoplasmic simplicity of Saxon manners seems a long and slow-unfolded period to us ; yet ancient Egypt thrice completed an era of equal length between the civilisation of the first pyramid-builders and the civilisation of the Ptolemies. This great tomb was nearly 4000 years old when Antony "well lost" the world for Cleopatra ; it was over 3000 years old when Greek art and literature reached their zenith in the closing years of Athenian supremacy ; it was more than 2000 when the Israelites made their exodus from Egypt and Jewish history began.

But if by these or any other methods of chronological computation we fail to realise the age of the Pyramids of Ghizeh, what are we to say of the still greater antiquity of that awful Figure which watches over them—the Father of Terror, as the Arabs call it—the tremendous and inscrutable Sphinx ? For the Sphinx, it is now known, is older than the gigantic sepulchres which it seems to

guard. Inscriptions discovered within recent years have proved that it is no mere mushroom growth of the Middle Empire, as was once supposed—no “jerry-built” edifice, if one may so express it, which had barely completed its two thousandth year at the commencement of the Christian era—but that it was in existence when the Pyramids themselves were being piled, and that, in all probability, one at least of their builders repaired it. It is certainly older, therefore, than the Fourth Dynasty, and, perhaps, even than the first; older, it may be, than Menes, the first human King of Egypt, and no more traceable to its beginnings than are the gods themselves. Even to think of its antiquity almost takes the breath away. Suppose it to have been only 300 years old when Cheops reigned, then it would already have been gazing for 4000 years across the desert when the Star of the Nativity was stayed over the manger at Bethlehem. One million four hundred and sixty thousand times had those

stony features been smitten by the level rays of that rising sun to which the great statue is dedicated; 133 generations of men had been born and grown up, had married and been given in marriage, had aged and passed away, and mouldered, for all the wrappings of the embalmer, into dust. Napoleon, in his grandiose, Hugonesque manner, told the soldiers of his Egyptian expedition that "forty centuries were looking down upon them." He did not often understate the case in his public deliverances, but in this particular instance he was unduly, though no doubt undesignedly, modest. Why, Alexander might almost have said as much of the Sphinx when he entered Pelusium to deliver Egypt from the Persian yoke, and the Father of Terror had more than completed its fifth millennium when Amr-Ibn-el-Asi led the hosts of Omar to the destruction of the tottering Byzantine rule.

Sixty, and not forty, was the number of those shadowy spectators that looked down

upon the struggle of Frenchmen and Arabs in 1798, and more than half that number had been witnesses of the overthrow of the rebel Ptolemy by the legionaries of Cæsar, of the meteor-like rush of the Macedonian conqueror on the richest spoil of the prostrate Persian—nay, even of the rout of the army of Psammetichus by the Immortals of Cambyzes. The Father of Terror has seen it all. Of all these far-off historic conflicts—big each one of them with the fates of East and West—the Sphinx has been a witness, and it was old itself when the oldest of them raged out its day of shock and tumult and died away into the silence of the desert. “Everything fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids,” wrote Abd-el-Latif, an Arabian physician of the twelfth century; and the audacious vaunt appears as well warranted now as it did, when it was uttered 700 years ago. It certainly seems justified of their stupendous guardian. If anything of human origin may defy that which all else

fears it is the Sphinx ; for apparently neither Time nor those forces of Nature with which Time conspires have permanent power over it. The Libyan sands have for ages threatened to submerge it. Their wind-blown masses are even now heaped high upon the back of the couchant figure and have buried one of those gigantic paws between which there stood once an open shrine. It is more than 3000 years since Thothmes was commanded in a dream by his "divine father," Ra-Harmachis, whose effigy it is, to clear away the encroachments of the desert. Man, moreover, has reinforced the hostility of Nature by his own puny efforts at destruction. The face of the Sphinx has been mutilated by Moslem fanaticism within comparatively recent times, and the brutal Mamelukes used it for a target. But the power of these upstart barbarians, its last assailants, was swept away in blood by Mohammed Ali on the fatal 1st of March, 1811 ; and the Sphinx remains, still fixing

upon the desert that mysterious gaze with which it had already for 2000 years confronted the endless caravan of days and nights when the Divine call came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees.

CHAPTER VI

THE CITY OF THE HUNDRED GATES

A SMILE of ineffable pity rests on the countenance of the aged, disabled, and supremely dirty beggar who squats at the base of the Northern Pylon of the great Temple of Karnak, as, powdered from head to foot with desert dust, we file past him at the tail of our dragoman through its gigantic portals. He is too lazy, too sublimely content with mere living, is this aged sage, to join for the moment in the pursuit of bakshish. Moreover, he has observed how his brother pests have sped on the hunt for piastres, and the result, so far, has not been encouraging. When Ali was thirty years younger he would have had more perseverance. Thirty years ago he would gladly enough have formed one of that crowd

of human flies which buzzes round and settles upon the visitor at the gates of every temple and on the steps of every tomb in Egypt ; and he would then, no doubt, have proved himself as pertinaciously importunate, as imperturbably good-humoured, as impenetrably proof against every known form of appeal, protest, or denunciation as is now the most widely exasperating of their number. And how much that is to say of him ! What an unbounded tribute to his powers of provocation and his willingness to provoke ! Our familiar English definition of such or such a man as “one who will not take No for an answer” would be a deplorably inadequate description of the Egyptian “bakshish fly,” the donkey-boy and his fellow-nuisances.

Take No for an answer, indeed ! They will not take it for an answer in any tongue spoken of man, whether in the East or West. They will not take it in any tone expressive of any variety of emotion, or appropriated to any mode of address—in the tone of amiable

deprecation, or of grave remonstrance, or of passionate entreaty, or of deadly hate. They will not take it in any form of language however potently fortified with the most vigorous phrases of European invective, or however richly arabesqued with the most highly decorative specimens of Oriental imprecation. They will take it only when emphasised with the stick, and unless the traveller feels sufficiently at home with them to punctuate his refusals with a stout cudgel, he is practically at their mercy. The venerable Ali is well aware of this ; yet it is apparently without any wish to join them that he watches the black swarm of Hamids and Hassans at their maddening work. The agonised voices of the victims are audible to him, where he squats, as their heart-felt utterances, sounding like so many extracts from an animated and somewhat profane Ollendorf, fill the dusty air. "No! no, thank you! No, I tell you! No, no! Be off! Get away! *Imshi!* I don't want it!

I tell you I don't want it! No, nor that, nor anything! I don't want a scarabæus; no, nor the foot of a mummy, nor a coin of the Ptolemies, nor a piece of sun-dried Nile mud inscribed with the cartouche of Rameses the Great. No! No, I tell you! No, confound you! No! No! No!!! . . . Look here, if you don't go away I'll——" and so on, *da capo*.

All these and many other ejaculations long familiar to him reach the ears of the aged man, as also do the cheerful cries of his fellow-countrymen. "Scarabee! Forpiaster! Very good Ramses! Mummy anteeker, Mister! Say 'ow much! You no want Ramses! Orright!" He sees the sufferers gradually shake off the terrible "bakshish fly" (*musca piastrisuga vulgaris*) and flee for sanctuary into the vast hall of the vastest temple in the world. Whereupon, having observed that hardly one of the tormentors has succeeded in drawing a single drop of blood, he composes himself to sleep

with the complacent reflection that Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, brings wisdom to the old ; and that it does not follow because Franks are so mad as to leave their own countries by thousands and tramp about foreign lands in droves of forty or fifty head, that they can be bled at any given moment by the exercise of sufficient importunity. Better for Ali to enjoy another hour's sleep in the shadow of the great Pylon, and fall upon his prey when they come forth exhausted by the perambulation of those acres of ruins, and confused to the last point of mental bewilderment by the explanations of their dragoman.

Not that these well-meant attempts of incomplete knowledge to enlighten complete ignorance through the medium of an imperfectly mastered language are necessary to the full obfuscation of the ordinary tourist. In any case, he is likely enough to emerge from the Temple of Karnak stupefied by that mere vastness of scale, those Titanic proportions of

architecture which ranked it ages ago, when it was intact or nearly so, and which rank it to-day, when it is a ruin, among the Wonders of the World. It is not the mere area of the mighty building which oppresses one, though four Cathedrals of Notre Dame would go, it is said, into the Hypostyle Hall. Nor is it merely the altitude to which the towering columns mount, or their enormous girth, or their forest-like array. You think of those huge pillars that lose themselves in the upper gloom at Seville, and of the endlessly intersecting avenues of the Mosque of Cordova ; and you feel that in these two points, at any rate, Karnak, if it be not exactly rivalled, is not so very far ahead. It is the astonishing successful combination of all the widely differing architectural effects which are severally produced by number, by size, by proportion, by disposition, by the imperious influence of mass, and the winning appeal of perspective—it is the combination of these into a phalanx of forces to be launched irresistibly against

the senses and the soul of the beholder that make the great temple what it is. Those Atlantean columns, which were built, surely, to uphold the heavens themselves, and which seem to bear up their enormous surmounting monoliths as a giant would lift a child, have no suggestion of unwieldiness in their colossal size, leave no sense of excess in their multitudinous number. The calyx-capital into which each column blossoms would take ten men to span its monstrous girth ; yet it opens out against the blue Egyptian sky above its roofless head as lightly as if it were the finest Gothic tracery above an English cathedral nave.

Everywhere the feeling of absolute fitness, of perfect proportion redeems this majestic hall of the offence of mere Brobdingnagerie ; and whether the eye dwells upon the parts or sweeps the whole—whether it travels through the endless alleys of this forest of stone, and rests by turns upon base and shaft and flower-like capital of its component columns, or

pauses to peruse walls deep-graven with colossal gods and kings, and still glowing here and there with the undying colours of 4000 years, the artistic taste is alike satisfied. So admirable, indeed, are the proportions of the whole that the stupendous bulk of its constituent parts is hardly realised. Derangement of their symmetry seems necessary to enable one to measure it in its full awfulness, as we do there, where one of these gigantic pillars has fallen and bows its hundreds of tons of weight and the superincumbent burden of its huge plinth, dislocated and askew, towards one of its fellows. The cause of this portentous displacement no man knows; but the vague tradition that ascribes it to the conqueror Cambyses may be safely dismissed. No mortal hands, relying solely on the strength of human muscles and the only known forces of an age that knew not of gunpowder could ever have done the work of inchoate destruction which is above our heads. Nothing short of an earthquake

could have thrust one of those tremendous plinths into the position of that overhanging horror.

Karnak is the greatest of the ruins of hundred-gated Thebes, as perhaps it is the greatest ruin of the world, but it is only one of many monuments, the least of which would suffice to make Luxor and its surroundings famous. For here, on the west bank of the Nile, are the Ramesseum, and the exquisite temple of Hathor at Medinet Habu, and those wonderful rock-built Tombs of the Kings which were rescued by so strange a series of chances from the hands of their Arab exploiters but a few years ago. Above all, here are those two dread effigies of Amenophis, the Colossi who sit for ever gazing side by side from the desert border over the green plain towards the Nile and that sunrise which was fabled to draw from the granite lips of the northern figure its mysterious morning song. Perhaps no Egyptian monument more keenly excites the interest of the Western

traveller, largely, no doubt, in virtue of its strange legend, than this, the so-called Vocal Memnon ; yet, seen after the Sphinx, it disappoints. Its position and surroundings are against it. All the associations of the Sphinx are with the loneliness of the inhuman desert, with the leagues of barren wind-blown sand, in the midst of which it rests half buried, and which in the course of ages has again and again submerged it. The Colossi, it is true, have the bare yellow spurs of the Libyan range behind them ; but their feet are actually set in the verdure of cultivation, and they look over smiling plots of wheat and lentil and *dura*, a kindly land enriched by human labour and made cheerful with the voice of man. Placed where they are they have too much the air of transported antiquities, of gigantic "curios" brought over from their native site and planted by some eccentric English landed proprietor in the midst of his fields. Arab fanaticism, moreover, or the rage of the Persian conqueror, has chipped

and battered their stony countenances out of all resemblance to a human face ; so that the effect of their towering figures and their attitude of majestic repose is unassisted by any of that strange fascination of expression which the Sphinx so powerfully exerts. Nevertheless, it would be an uncanny sight enough, one can well believe, to see those gigantic featureless figures glimmering through the grey twilight of an Egyptian dawn, the while one waited for the first level shaft of light from the East to smite the vocal effigy, and awaken that weird strain of music which the traveller of olden days so often journeyed from afar to hear. To the Greeks of the classic period, with their happy knack of poetising legend, the note uttered by the statue was the sweet and plaintive greeting of Memnon, slain at Troy, to his dawn-mother Eos. To the sceptical Strabo, writing three centuries after that period, it seemed the effect of some natural, though conjectural cause, and one can see plainly enough that

the worthy geographer more than suspected it to be a mere imposture of the priests designed to increase their hold on the superstition of the faithful.

“When I was at those places with Cælius Gallus, and numerous friends about him, I heard a noise (says he) at the first hour of the day, but whether proceeding from the base or from the Colossus, or produced on purpose by some of those standing round the base, I cannot confidently assert. But from the uncertainty of the cause I am disposed to believe anything rather than that stones disposed in that manner could send forth sound.” To the modern man of science the morning song of the Memnon, when audible at all, which is very rarely the case, is a simple physical phenomenon, easily explicable in terms of force and matter. According to eminent physicists it is perfectly possible for a hard resonant stone, exposed to the sudden heat of the morning sun-rays following upon the cold Egyptian nights, to emit a sound.

Professor Ebers has heard the like under the porphyry cliffs of Sinai ; the granite sanctuary of Karnak, the granite quarries of Assouan are said to be musical also ; and the “music-stones” of the Orinoco are well known. The extensive broken and sloping surface of the Colossus, wet with the dews of early morning—the tears of Eos over her child, according to the Greek myth—becomes suddenly warm at sunrise, and “the current of air produced by this rapid change of temperature passing over its rough and pebbly surface” produces the mystic sound. The “eminent physicists” who offer us this explanation of the song of the Northern Colossus have omitted, it will be seen, to explain the silence of its colleague ; but this by the way. Enough that science satisfies herself in the matter, and that as the chant of the Memnon was holy to the mytho-poet and fraudulent to the ancient geographer, so it is simply a natural effect of heat and moisture to the modern sage. To our assembled party at the base of the statue

it is the resonant clang of a small metallic gong or tambourine, stricken by an exceptionally tattered Arab, who has with catlike agility swarmed up the twenty feet or so of pedestal and granite calf and clambered over the thigh of the Colossus into his monstrous lap, in the hollow of which both instrument and musician could easily lie concealed. It was typical of the history of human thought ! First, the age of myth ; secondly, the age of religious faith ; thirdly, the age of philosophic doubt ; and lastly, the age of blank and ribald materialism. At one end of the long chain of the centuries a hushed and awe-stricken throng of kneeling worshippers waiting for a sign ; at the other, a crowd of globe-trotters gazing upward from the backs of their donkeys, while a ragged Arab clambers on to the knees of the desecrated Memnon to bang a gong for a piastre.

Let us be thankful, however, that the descent from the sublime to the vulgar is no worse than this. Better the weaponless

native, who slides down the statue, leaving it none the worse for his having mounted it, than the terrible foreigner, armed with jack-knife and chisel, bent on immortalising his name by inscribing it side by side with the cartouche of a Pharaoh.

There is, or was, an American—his identity the relator of his exploits mercifully conceals—who went the round of the Egyptian temples with a pot of tar in one hand and a brush in the other, and daubed his idiotic signature on the walls of each. The motive which prompts these outrages defies psychological analysis. One can only tentatively conjecture that men like the Yankee with the tar brush hope that we, who disgustedly read their names, will “wonder who and what they are.” Whereas we do not wonder, we know. We could name and classify them as easily as we can the animals they probably rode; and our only wonder is what particular circle of the Inferno is reserved for their final abode. Happily there are none

such among the (generally speaking) helpless, but invariably respectful and well-conducted ignoramuses who are gathered at this moment round the feet of the twin giants.

We are a motley and polyglot band, no doubt, numbering, as we do, among us a highly-respected English Bishop *in partibus infidelium*, a London surgeon of world-wide fame alike for his personal skill and for the success with which he has advanced the borders of his science, a German sculptor of high distinction, and a jockey whose name, as that of one of the foremost and most accomplished of English horsemen, is familiar to every turf-loving member of our widely-scattered race. Invalids in search of health, idlers in search of distraction, busy men in search of rest, or at any rate change; Germans indulging their newly-acquired national taste for rambling; Frenchmen anxious to look on the land with which they claim so mysteriously sentimental a connection; Americans calmly bent upon doing the

world within a fixed period and being "on time" at the finish—these make up the remainder of our company. A harmless, nay, an eminently respectable, if for the most part an, Egyptologically speaking, unlearned party. Yet what irony in the thought that these mighty stones around us were piled by groaning millions under the scourges of their square-browed tyrants to make a holiday sight for us! Shelley's well-known sonnet on the empty boast of "Osymandias, King of Kings" did that potentate injustice. Osymandias, it is agreed, was Rameses the Great, and certainly the mightiest monarchs "looking on his works" might well "despair." But though the Ramesseum and the Temple of Karnak have survived to render his name eternal, he, like every Pharaoh of them all, has missed the far more vital eternity that he sought.

With infinite care and pains did the great king labour to protect his mortal remains from displacement, so that after the lapse of long

ages the soul might find them ready for reunion with it under the decree of the gods of the dead. It was for this purpose that the highest and costliest skill of the embalmer was secured for the preparation of the mummy; for this that the Royal Tombs of Der-el-Bahari were scooped deep in the living rock, and the ponderous sarcophagi disposed far down in its lowest and inmost recesses. Nay, it might almost have seemed as if Nature, co-operating with the designs of the Pharaohs, had assisted to secure the everlasting sanctity of these sepulchres by covering them for ages under the desert sands. But in vain. Rameses the Great proposed (about 1300 B.C.), but in 1871 Abd-er-Rasûl Ahmed, native of the Arab village of Kurnah, virtually disposed. For in that year Abd-er-Rasûl, "prospecting around" among these sand-strewn rocks, chanced upon a large buried tomb filled with coffins heaped one upon another. On the greater number of them the cartouche and other signs indicated that their tenants

were Royal personages, and that their lucky discoverer had made a "find" of the greatest value. They were the mummies of kings, queens, and princesses belonging to no fewer than five Egyptian dynasties, and among them was that of Rameses the Great.

But alas! for Abd-er-Rasûl! They were too heavy for one man to remove, or even effectively to rifle. He had to let two of his brothers and one of his sons into the secret, and unable to dispose of the mummies *en gros* they determined to exploit them *en détail*. For some time the firm drove a prosperous trade among chance tourists on the Nile, selling them these priceless treasures doubtless for, comparatively speaking, so many "songs," and replenishing their store, whenever it ran short, by gruesome descents, under cover of the night, to the bottom of these long hidden tombs, forty feet beneath the earth's surface, and approached by a sculptured and pictured corridor of seventy yards in length. The game, however, was too good

to last. Scarabs, papyri, jewels, of startling age and yet undoubted genuineness, began to find their way into the hands of experts, and Egyptologists began to smell a rat. M. Maspero, the indefatigable Director of the Boulak Museum, was communicated with, and promptly betook himself to Thebes, armed with full powers of investigation. Abd-er-Rasûl was arrested by the police, examined—some say “put to the question” in the old grim sense of the phrase—imprisoned, released, and finally frightened into turning “Khedive’s evidence” and making a clean breast of it to the Mudîr of Keneh. Then all the Royal mummies were exhumed, and as some of them were found to be decomposing, M. Maspero decided to unroll the whole collection, and Rameses II. was the first of these mighty rulers and builders whose features were shown to the world once more, after a lapse of 3200 years. That exposure meant the final defeat of the crowning effort of his religious creed. Osiris and his forty-

two colleagues may have long since pronounced favourable sentence on him in the judgment-hall of the under world ; and Thoth, the clerk of the gods, may have duly inscribed it on his papyrus roll. But the body of Osymandias, King of Kings, which was embalmed so carefully and hidden so sedulously within tons of granite sarcophagus, and under fathoms of limestone rock, to be in everlasting readiness for re-animation, lies black and mouldering in the Ghizeh Museum, as unfit for reunion with the soul as are the bones of his son, Seti Menepthah, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, bleaching at the bottom of the Red Sea.

CHAPTER VII

A THEBAN RACE MEETING

IN the splendid pæan of the Book of Exodus over the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the overthrow, not only of "Pharaoh's chariots," but of his "horsemen" also, is triumphantly celebrated. If, however, the word "horsemen" here means "knights" or "troopers," and not merely "charioteers," the passage of Scripture is surely the only testimony to the existence of a cavalry arm or even to the practice of the art of equitation among the early Egyptians that ancient records afford. No such evidence seems at any rate to be discoverable in their wall-paintings or mural sculpture. Any number of Egyptian kings may be seen portrayed in the act of shooting at their foes with bow

and arrow from a chariot, and, possibly, one might find pictured examples of the employment of such vehicles for ceremonial purposes ; but neither in battle, nor pageant, nor pastime, nor religious rite does one ever meet with any king of the first twenty dynasties or so, or any of his subjects, "outside a horse." There was no Theban race meeting while Thebes was. No enterprising citizen of the hundred-gated city ever started a hundred-and-first gate at which money might be taken for the privilege of witnessing from a favourable position a trial of speed between Egyptian horses. No Seti or Rameses ever gave a cup to be run for, or founded a "stakes" fund to be for ever named after him, and to constitute a surer passport than mummification to immortality. Never, therefore, under any of those monarchs can such an occasion have arisen as that which to-day seems to have brought the whole population of Luxor, permanent and temporary, thronging forth on foot, on donkey or camel back,

to the outlying strip of grassland which serves the town for a racecourse.

The dwellers in this corner of the ruins of ancient Thebes—insignificant fraction as they are of its once vast population—have done their best, it must be owned, to make a good show. There are, perhaps, 4000 or so of native Egyptians, collected together from Luxor and its vicinity, traders of the town, local donkey-boys with their “allied industries,” loafers from the neighbouring villages, and so forth ; and, packed three or four deep along the rope that lines the half-mile of “straight” which constitutes the entire course, they present a curiously picturesque contrast to the race-going crowd that assembles on Epsom Downs or Ascot Heath. Blue and white, with an occasional splash of red from a fez, form a prettier arrangement of colour than those rows of black and grey wideawakes, surmounting grey and black masses of clothing, which together make up the general effect produced by an assembly

of Englishmen. It is true you miss that sudden lightening-up—as of a windswept wheatfield—of the European multitude, when their white faces all turn in the same direction; but the loss of this one impressive touch of *chiaroscuro* is more than compensated by that incessant play of shifting hues which flickers along the forms and faces of any restless Oriental crowd.

And restless is scarcely the word for the throng assembled here, with their native excitability heightened tenfold by their intense eagerness to witness what is to most of them so unusual a scene. Indeed, were it not for the difference between English and Egyptian methods of police this crowd would, no doubt, be an uncontrollable one. As it is, and given that difference, the task of controlling it is as easy as that of keeping even the most good-humoured of English crowds within the prescribed bounds is difficult. Here the swarthy guardian of order guards it in the most elementary of fashions—mainly, that is to say,

by the profuse and indiscriminate employment of the whip. When he desires to make the native public "dress up in line" he cheerfully hammers their bare toes with the handle of his *kourbash*. When they are straying carelessly over the course between races, as crowds will do, and he desires to clear it, he simply flogs them off it with the lash. The thong whistles merrily round their brown calves, and they fly like a flock of sheep, startled, but not angered, alike without resistance and without rancour. It seems as natural a thing to them that they should be drilled and marshalled by liberally lavished blows as that they themselves should direct the movements of their donkeys by the same means. And even if they were possessed of full Parliamentary institutions, it is extremely doubtful whether any one of them would care enough about the matter to move the member for his constituency to "ask a question" on the subject in an Egyptian House of Commons.

The Beshereens, who are to figure in the first event of the day, belong to a race which is only sparsely represented among the spectators; but it is doubtful whether the local methods of coercion could be very hopefully tried on them. There is hardly a greater difference between the hound and the hare than there is between this spirited son of the Nubian desert and the fellah of the Nile Valley. Lithe, shiny, jet black, nearly naked, his woolly hair twisted into unwilling plaits, bright-eyed, with teeth of dazzling whiteness, and an alert animated air which contrasts strongly with the dull, meek expression of the Egyptian and Egyptianised Arab, the Beshereen, as we view him side by side with the lighter-skinned and more heavily draped races around him, looks as if he might indeed have sat for that "Fuzzy Wuzzy" who earned name and benediction from Mr. Rudyard Kipling, as the only naked warrior who ever "bruk a British square." From his fantastic top-knot to the

sole of his sable foot, every inch of him is of the stuff of which fighting men are made. You would like to see him figuring in an assault-of-arms with his native weapon, the spear, in his hands, instead of making what it must be owned, was very moderate time as a "sprinter" in the first event on the card, a copy of which is here subjoined:

THE LUXOR SPORTING CLUB.

SECOND MEETING.

Thursday, Jan. 4, 1894, commencing at three p.m.

PROGRAMME.

1. Beshereen race.
2. Donkey-boys' race, standing on donkeys.
3. Buffalo race.
4. Gentlemen's donkey race, facing donkey's tail.
5. Camel race.
6. Horse race. First and second heat. Best three of each to run in the final.
7. Ladies' donkey race, dropping rings from palm-sticks into jars.
8. Horse race. Final heat.
9. Donkey-boys' race, without saddle or bridle.

10. Thread and needle race, on donkeys, for ladies and gentlemen.

11. Wrestling on donkeys, for donkey-boys.

Still, one must, no doubt, vary the programme as much as possible at a meeting of this sort, and the Beshereen foot-race serves well enough to whet our interest in what is to follow. The next event, a "donkey-boys' race, standing on donkeys," is vastly popular; and as the dozen or so of rival jackasses are seen coming up the straight at a pace generally pronounced to be good, and which, indeed, does in some instances border upon a gallop, a roar of Arabic ejaculations goes up from the side of the racecourse opposite the double row of awning-shaded seats which constitute the "grand stand." Many of the animals are completing the race alone—apparently as a matter of duty—their riders, like the guests in Omar Khayyam's convivial lines, "star-scattered on the grass;" but the struggle between the remaining four or five donkeys, whose backs are still tenanted, would offer

almost unlimited scope for the operations of the bookmaker, if there were any "ring."

For up to the very last moment it is quite evidently anybody's race. Indeed, it is, if one may so put it, even more "anybody's race" than any horse-race could possibly be. To say that a horse-race is anybody's race means that any one horse seems as likely to outstrip its competitors as any other. To say that a donkey-race with riders standing on the animals' backs is anybody's race may mean—and in this instance does mean—not only that any one donkey seems as likely to outstrip its competitors as any other, but that any one rider seems as likely (or as unlikely) as any other to maintain his balance. And inasmuch as any increase in the speed of the donkey tends to enhance the insecurity of his rider's foothold, and therewith the risk of his disqualification through slipping off its back, it follows that the probability of any one donkey's first passing the post varies inversely as his chance of winning the stakes. His

effective "expectation of success" under these circumstances could not perhaps be precisely measured without resort to algebraical formula; but it can be easily seen, and may be roughly said, that that expectation is vague enough to make the contest a very "open thing."

In the present case, the donkey who is leading at almost a dozen yards from home is followed by a rival whose rider seems to have, so to speak, a certain amount of equilibrium "in hand," while it is itself ridden by a youth whose inclination to the horizon is rapidly tending to exceed those angular limits to which man's enjoyment of his glorious privilege, the erect attitude, is restricted. The question, therefore, is whether the time during which a donkey moving at a given velocity—the product of a frequently and freely given stick—can cover so many yards of a racecourse is greater or less than the time which a human body of a fixed weight, but with an unfixed footing, will take to slip off that donkey's back to the ground. It is a

pretty problem ; but the pace is too good for the most expert mathematician to have tackled it. Before he could have said "x," the gallant little animal got its head past the post, at the very moment when the last toe of the tottering Arab reluctantly loosed hold of its "back hair ;" and rider and stakes were at the same moment successfully landed.

The next event, the buffalo-race, might be simply disposed of by saying that it was won by a man seated astride of a buffalo. Such a description of the winner would not lead to any confusion, for there was no other competitor who answered to it at the finish. Nevertheless this contest would have had its interest for a zoologist ; and, indeed, like the last, for a mathematician also, if only as showing the number of combinations, other than the ordinary equestrian one, which may be formed out of a man and a buffalo as the result of a buffalo-race. In the first place—and this, it must be admitted, was the most frequent combination, if such it

can be called—the buffalo may arrive at the winning-post without the man, who in that case usually contemplates the close of the contest from a sitting position some fifty or a hundred yards in the rear. Or, secondly, the man may arrive without the buffalo, which occurs in those cases in which the buffalo, having rid himself of his rider at an early stage of the proceedings, makes at once for his desert home. Or, thirdly, the man may arrive at the winning-post dragging the buffalo after him, which occurs when a buffalo having thrown without disabling his rider shows a disposition to exchange the part of a competitor for that of a spectator. Or fourthly, the buffalo may arrive, dragging the man after him, a situation generally created by the endeavours of a dismounted rider to stop his runaway steed by seizing its tail. Or, lastly, the man and the buffalo may reach the post side by side, the former affectionately clasping the latter round the neck, and making desperate but

unsuccessful efforts to remount him as he runs.

Something of the same elasticity of procedure was noticeable in the "gentlemen's donkey race, facing donkey's tail," where the animals who succeeded in dislodging their jockeys either retired promptly from the contest—the difficulties of remounting being in the circumstances insuperable—or made the pace gratuitously hot for those who were still in the race ; while the donkeys who found themselves still bestridden, but in no degree controlled, naturally took a line of their own, which usually led them anywhere rather than to the goal which their respective and retrospective riders fondly imagined themselves to be approaching. It was almost a relief to turn from these fantastic and semi-jocular trials of speed and skill to the straightforward and almost appalling simplicity of the camel race. No one who has not seen the "ship of the desert" under a press of sail, so to speak, can have any idea of the

number of knots an hour which it can make ; while as to picturing to the imagination the appearance of a fully "extended" camel, the feat may be simply pronounced impossible. The finish in this race was magnificent. Three camels flew along neck-and-neck—and such necks!—for full a hundred yards to within a few lengths of the post, their ungainly heads erect, their splay, disjointed legs opening and shutting at each stride like a dozen jack-knives worked by machinery, and their riders literally waving fore and aft with the violence of the motion, as if a giant was about to hurl them from a sling. How they held on nobody could see, and Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, alone knew. Some knelt, grasping the brute's retorted neck ; some sat or crouched on the saddle-seat ; some frankly extended themselves almost at full length on the animal's mountainous dorsal ridge, and clung on to the hump as a shipwrecked sailor might cling to a rock. It was a sight to haunt the

waking memory, and to ride the dyspeptic dreams.

After the camel race the humours of the Theban race meeting began, it must be admitted, to flag a little. The horse-race was very much like Western horse-races, with performers not of the first class, and the bare-backed donkey-race was commonplace. One of the ladies' events disappeared from the card altogether, and the other drew a very small field, and went but tamely off. Popular interest was evidently centred on the last event of the day—the "wrestling on donkeys for donkey-boys"—the boys being, of course, not as the wording of the programme might appear to suggest the prizes of the competition, but the competitors. Three or four pairs of them entered for the contest, and a struggle of longer duration, of more indomitable spirit, or of so many and such surprising vicissitudes no one need wish to see. The last of the bouts is the best contested of them all. One of the two wrestlers

is a stumpy, thick-set little donkey-boy, the other leaner and lither, a little the less skilled performer of the two in attack, but almost impossible to dislodge. His legs seem everywhere. He uses them like a couple of additional straps attached to the animal's harness, and while you are wondering how it is that he holds on when every other part of his person seems detached from the donkey, you notice at last that one brown foot has been passed under the donkey's belly and between her hind legs, and is hooked firmly on to one of her hocks. There is as much manœuvring for position and the players seem as fastidious about their "grip" as in a wrestling match in the Cornish and Devonshire style. Round and round they circle, catching at and again loosing each other, until, each satisfied, apparently, with his momentary position, they close. The shorter donkey-boy has the taller round the middle, and is exerting desperate efforts to dislodge him. To and fro they sway, and again and

again he seems—but only seems—to have succeeded in his attempt. Now, surely, he has him—Ali is slipping over his donkey's haunches. No! he is up again, and well forward in his saddle. Stop! he is too much forward. Hassan, by that clever twist, has got him on his donkey's withers. He is off! He is down. No! he is on! He is up again! And now it is Hassan himself who is in difficulties. Thus swings the balance of Fortune, this way and that, and in the meantime the behaviour of the donkeys is the most exquisitely funny part of the whole proceedings. Side by side they stand while this battle is raging on their backs, motionless, absolutely impassive, and with an air of intense thoughtfulness on their expressive countenances.

On a sudden, and without the slightest previous warning, one of them lowers his pensive head and throws his heels wildly into the air. The kick of a donkey is in itself not a very common phenomenon; but this is

not a single kick, but a volley. Not a few notes carelessly struck with the hoof, so to speak, but an elaborate fantasia—a passionate *bravura* of recalcitration. Its contrast with the previous inertia of the animal is so amazing that the spectator is confounded. To what, he asks himself, is this sudden and vehement participation in the contest to be attributed? To art or nature? To asinine impulse or to human suggestion? The latter seems more probable, for keen-eyed observers declare that at critical moments they have detected Ali in the act of kicking his opponent's donkey with his disengaged heel. The stratagem, however, if stratagem it be, is in any case a failure; for the tempest-tossed Hassan neither loses seat nor looses hold. After a few vain wrenches Ali is fain to fall back on the defensive. The crowd—which has long since broken through the barriers—presses closer and closer round the wrestlers, too deeply interested to shout or chatter. The police, themselves absorbed in

the struggle, forget to flog them back behind the ropes, and for the moment bear the whip in vain. Nay, the very shins they were operating upon half an hour ago now press with impunity against their own sacred calves. Authority is human, and stares open-mouthed, as though made of common clay.

But now the sun is sinking, and the long contest draws to a close. Twice have the panting combatants released each other, paused to recover breath, and again buckled to; and this third round is the last. The grip of Ali's right leg round his donkey's neck has been gradually relaxing, and his adversary, disengaging him by a dexterous or fortunate twist from the saddle, lays him flat on his back upon the grass. The hard-fought battle, and with it the Luxor Second Meeting, is over; and remounting our donkeys, into whom the sight of their contending brethren seems to have breathed an unwonted spirit of emulation, we gallop back in a golden sunset-lighted cloud of dust to the town.

CHAPTER VIII

A COLOSSAL COLLOQUY

ON the edge of the Libyan wilderness, about a bowshot to the east of the line "that just divides the desert from the sown," their backs turned to the mountain and their faces to the river, sit and have sat for more than thirty centuries the two Colossi of Amenophis. Of the temple that they once guarded scarce a vestige remains—only the stele recording the pompous titles of the royal temple-builder, and commending him and his work to an immortality which the great fane whose very ground-plan is now lost has done nothing to preserve. Nature herself has undergone a change in the course of these three thousand years, and Tama and Shama, as the Arabs call them, once high and dry at all

seasons of the year, now sit through the months of overflow with their huge feet in the flooding Nile waters, and throughout the winter and springtime plant them in its rich alluvium, green with the sprouting wheat, or blue-flecked with blossoms of the lentil.

More than sixteen hundred years had passed since either of them had uttered a sound, and the silence was becoming monotonous. Shama, the Southern Colossus, was the first to break it.

"Are you still there, Tama?" he asked, in a low and carefully modulated voice, which, however, awoke thunderous echoes from the Libyan range behind him, and slightly shook the windows of the Luxor Hotel.

"Why, certainly," replied his companion in the same subdued tone.

"It seems an age since I heard you sing at sunrise," muttered the Southern Colossus.

"Does it?" said Tama, with a slightly ironical inflection of the voice. "Only an

age? Time seems to pass quicker with you than it does with me, or else your reckoning of it is different from mine. Considering, at least, that one World Empire has passed away, that the Power that wrested from it the dominion of the East has itself been waning for five centuries, and that Egypt has passed under a dozen dynasties, and more than a hundred rulers since I sang my last morning hymn, 'an age' seems rather an inadequate measure of the period, don't you think?"

"How long do you make it, then?" inquired Shama, somewhat nettled.

"Can't you calculate it yourself? You must know very well that I haven't sung since I was repaired."

"Which was in the year—what?"

"About 200 A.D., wasn't it?" said the Northern Colossus, after a short pause of reflection.

"Well, if you can't remember the exact date," observed Shama, shaking down a little

avalanche of débris from a mound behind him with a rumble of suppressed laughter, "I can hardly be expected to."

"What does it matter within a year or two. It was the fool's trick of Septimius Severus whenever it was, and I know that it was about the end of the second century that he brought a party here for an Egyptian tour. They came with the special object of hearing me sing, and because I didn't happen to be in the humour to perform just then, he must needs restore me from the waist upwards, by way, as he imagined, of propitiating the god. The consequence is that I have never sung a note since."

"The consequence, you call it," echoed the Southern Colossus. "Well, I have never been musical myself, so of course I don't know what sort of provocation it requires to make an offended singer keep silence for sixteen hundred years; but I confess I don't quite see where the connection comes in, or why you should have left off singing because

Severus had some much-needed repairs executed in your upper story."

"What? Not as an everlasting lesson to all rash restorers?"

"Rash restorers!" echoed Shama, contemptuously. "You talk as if your song had been as old as yourself, and a natural or supernatural birth-gift of your own."

The Southern Colossus spoke with some tartness of tone. He was a little irritated at his brother's airs of superiority. The Northern Figure maintained a dignified silence.

"Look here," resumed Shama at last, "I think that after all these years we might as well be candid with each other. It won't do to talk about your singing as though it were an accomplishment of immense antiquarian value. As a matter of fact, we both of us know very well that you hadn't a note in you before the earthquake of B.C. 27. A musical career of only a little over a couple of centuries isn't much to make a fuss about."

"It might have occurred to a more logical

mind than yours," observed Tama coldly, "that if my power of singing was created by an injury, nothing would be more likely to reduce me to silence than its repair. But who says I never had a note of music in me before B.C. 27?"

"Well, there is no mention of it whatever in any very early record, and no one, at any rate, seems to have paid much attention to it before the Roman period."

"Have you forgotten the beautiful legend of the Greeks?"

"By no means. But the Greeks were in the habit of inventing beautiful legends with very slight provocation from the facts."

"To them," said the Northern Colossus dreamily, "I was the statue of Memnon, the son of Tithonus and Aurora, the ill-fated young Ethiopian prince who was the first to be slain before the walls of Troy; and my song at sunrise was the voice of my lament to my mother, the Morning, even as the dews which she sprinkled upon me were her

tears shed for her hapless son. Ah, me ! It was indeed a lovely myth."

"Oh, lovely !" said Shama, with a sneer. "But you must forgive me for reminding you that my own surface is just as dewy as yours at daybreak, and, further, that since we are as like as two beans in one of those pods down below in the field yonder, my claim to be a statue of Memnon would appear to be every bit as good as yours. Besides, why keep up the pretence of believing this silly old fable between ourselves ? You must know as well as I do that the whole of the Memnon legend arose out of a ridiculous Greek misunderstanding of an Egyptian word, and that we are neither of us anything more romantic or mysterious than a sandstone portrait model of His Majesty King Amenhotep III."

In the stony recesses of his inmost heart—say, at a depth of about five feet from the surface—the Northern Colossus was as well aware of this fact as his brother, and he relapsed into a melancholy silence of some

two years and a half. But, on one exquisite spring morning at the close of this period, just as the first shaft of sunrise darted across the Nile from the broken sky-line of the Arabian desert and smote his songless lips he spoke again.

"I suppose you accept the scientific explanation, then?" he said, in a somewhat embarrassed tone.

"Of course I do," replied Shama, quoting briskly from Baedeker. "The sounds which used formerly to proceed from you are on no account to be attributed to any mere priestly trick, for, in the opinion of eminent physicists it is perfectly possible that a hard resonant stone, heated by the warm sunshine suddenly following upon the cold nights in Egypt, might emit a sound in the early morning. Perhaps you are not aware that a similar phenomenon has been observed under the porphyry cliffs in the Sinai Mountains, though you might be expected to know that it has been also met with as near home

as in the granite sanctuary just over the river at Karnak. It is possible that when your extensive broken and sloping surface—I speak, of course, of your condition previous to your injudicious restoration by Severus—was ‘exposed to the direct rays of the rising sun while wet with the dews of early morning, a current of air might have been set up by this sudden change of temperature, and, passing over your rough and pebbly surface, might have produced the famous music. In that case the phenomenon would naturally cease when the upper part of the figure was replaced.’ ”

Shama recited this instructive passage with considerable fluency. Fragments of it had, in fact, been wafted up to him on many different occasions from the groups of sightseers round his base, and he had once heard it read out *in extenso*—and a loud voice—by a tourist who had mistaken him for the vocal Colossus, and under that delusion had clambered up into his lap.

"Yes ; that is all there is to it," he continued. "Just for about two hundred and twenty-seven years you, owing solely to an injury, were a musical prodigy, while I, simply because I hadn't so much the matter with me, have never been able to sing a note."

"All art is morbid," murmured Tama, sadly, yet with a touch of complacency. "Genius is a kind of disease."

"And you," said his brother contemptuously, "could be proud of such a gift as that ! Why, I would as soon plume myself on the performance of the Arab who swarms up your leg for a piastre and hides himself between your thighs to beat a tom-tom."

"Fool !" cried the Northern Colossus angrily ; "Don't you see that I owe that very indignity to the fact that I can no longer make music of my own ?"

"Well, and suppose you could do so once more, what, in these days, would be the consequence ? Why, simply this : That there

would be personally conducted parties every morning at daybreak, to hear the performances. And what would that mean? More tourists, more donkeys, more shouting Arabs, more spouting dragomen, more scarab-sellers, more mummy-hunters, more carved Smiths from Birmingham, and sculptured Browns from Chicago on your pedestal. But perhaps you enjoy that sort of thing?"

To this unworthy taunt the silently-indignant Tama vouchsafed no reply.

"You don't answer? I suppose you really do enjoy it. You positively like being vulgarised."

The offensive word was too much for the mighty figure to endure.

"Vulgarised!" he cried in a voice of wrath that rumbled up the Valley of the Nile to the First Cataract like thunder among the hills. "Vulgarised! O, Father Time! As if anything on earth could vulgarise us! Are we the meaner or the newer or the less awful for the bees that hum around our heads and hide

in the crevices of our limbs? And what more power over us have the wingless, two-legged insects that crawl on the earth beneath us, creatures of a but little longer day? Do you forget how many generations of them we have seen—how many swarms of these human locusts have passed over the land and disappeared—how many conquerors, as they call themselves, have swept with their hosts along the valley towards the prize of Thebes, and trampled these fair, green fields into a mire of blood to grasp it? Do you remember them I say? Ethiopian and Assyrian, Babylonian and Mede, Cambyzes and his Immortals, Alexander and his phalanx, Cæsar and his legions, Omar and his savage horsemen, Bonaparte and his eager levies—all, all have passed before us, in storm of battle or in pageant of victory, and all have vanished into the night! But we—we remain.”

“Yes,” said the Southern Colossus, who had not been unaffected by his companion’s

outburst, but thought fit to hide his emotion under a mask of cynicism. "Yes, we remain, if that is a matter on which to congratulate ourselves. And I have no doubt we shall see out the present occupants of the country; which, by the way, may be all the worse for the fellah who seems as eternal as ourselves."

"Fear not but we shall outlive this tribe of red coats and black hats as we have outlived the turbaned warriors they have displaced and the mail-clad legionaries of the dynasty before. And then, like enough, that cry of the fellaheen, which has moaned along this valley from the age of the pyramid builders till it was hushed but yesterday, may ascend once more. But we—we shall remain when these things of yesterday have passed away. To the human insects of an hour we shall stand, as we have always stood, for the emblems of an antiquity to which he must bow the head in awe."

The Northern Colossus had hardly ceased speaking when, under the fast-broadening

sunlight, two early visitors from Luxor trotted up on their donkeys to the base of Shama's pedestal. They dismounted and proceeded leisurely to examine him.

"Observe the cartouche of Amenhotep III.," said the first visitor, "and the inscription, 'Son of the Sun. Beloved of——.'"

"Oh, yes," said the second, though in no very profoundly interested tone. "Quartzose sandstone, you see. This came from the quarries between Keneh and Koser, no doubt. You notice, I daresay, that it does not belong to the formation of the district, which consists, I need hardly tell you, of nummulite limestone. You don't find the sandstone-conglomerate until you get as high as——"

"The waist. Yes, that is where the restoration began. But it is rather singular, considering how fond the Roman Emperors were of airing their Egyptian titles, that one doesn't find any record of the fact. I wish, old chap, you would just take a turn round

the base of the Colossus and see if you can happen upon a cartouche beginning with a hieroglyphic resembling a dicky-bird looking into a stable-bucket. Because that will be the signature of Septimius Severus Autocrator, the Johnny who——”

“By Jove! Here’s a find!”

“What is it? A scarab? Eh? Of the eighteenth dynasty? A relic of that infinitely dim and distant past which——”

“Pooh!” exclaimed his companion, in a tone of withering contempt. “Infinitely dim and distant fiddlestick! Why, the whole show is an affair of yesterday. Late tertiary, every foot of it. You and your scarabs! No, no, my boy! Nothing so beastly modern as that. Look at it,” he continued, holding out his treasure-trove. “Do you know what it is? No! Well, then, let me tell you that, from the geologist’s point of view, it is the only thing of any decent age in the place. It’s *Xanthopsis Paulino-Würtembergicus*, one of those fossil-crabs which the Arabs offer

you for a few piastres on the Mokattam, and which have been deposited here or there by the sea that swept over this desert a few million years before these two sandstone gentlemen took the seat that, no doubt, in the modern spirit of unrest, they are beginning to get tired of already."

And, lightly humming to himself an adaptation of the irreverent French refrain,

Car ils sont en pierre, en pierre,
Pour eux ce n'est pas amusant,

the geologist wandered away in quest of new "indications."

Tama, fortunately, had not heard the conversation, and Shama, who had, had never heard geology talked before, and did not understand it. Hence there was nothing to mar the stony complacency with which, unconscious of their comparative juvenility, they continued staring over the Nile.

CHAPTER IX

AHMED, THE TOMB-ROBBER

ON the wall of the passage leading to the interior of the Great Pyramid you will find scrawled with some rude pigment in the Arabic script the words "Ahmed the Carpenter." Tradition has it that this is the sign-manual of the enterprising explorer who was the first, at least under the Arab domination of Egypt, to force his way into the mighty sepulchre. Not, of course, the absolute first to violate King Khufu's "house of eternity." The Persians had broken into it more than a thousand years before, when already it was over thirty centuries old, and no doubt the Romans also at the beginning of the Christian era. But to Ahmed, the

Arab artisan of the ninth century A.D., belongs the honour, such as it is, of having anticipated the Khalif Mâmûn in penetrating once again into the recesses of the Giant Tomb. Whether he got much for his trouble except the barren glory of recording his exploit on the passage-wall is extremely doubtful. A field which had been reaped by Cambyes and probably gleaned by a Roman pro-consul of the Empire was likely to be pretty bare; and it may be that "Tomb-breaker" rather than "Tomb-robber" would be the proper appellative of this Mohamadan artisan. It has been solemnly decided by the English Court for the Consideration of Crown Cases Reserved that the attempt to pick an empty pocket does not amount to the offence even of constructive larceny, and it may reasonably be assumed that at the time when this particular Ahmed effected his burglarious entrance into it, the Great Pyramid, so far as jewels and other ornaments of the dead are concerned, was completely "cleaned

out." Another of his name in later days has been more fortunate.

"Would you like to see Ahmed the Carpenter's spiritual heir?" asked a well-known English resident at Luxor, as we stood watching the noisy crowd of Arabs before the Pylon of the Ramesseum. "His namesake, too, by the way," he added with a sudden touch of that mysterious satisfaction which is always aroused by the discovery of coincidence. "Curious! There must be something in the name of Ahmed that impels the owner of it to break into tombs. Yes, that's the fellow, the old man who has just shaken hands with the dragoman, and is now exchanging salutations with the native police. Oh, yes. On excellent terms with the constituted authorities nowadays. Still, they keep their eye upon him, and if our friend Ahmed Abd-er-Rasûl were often to be seen walking pensively at eventide in the direction of those hills yonder I have an idea that he would be shadowed."

Meanwhile, there was no sign of any constraint in his relations with the representatives of the law. The grey, wiry, rather humorous-looking Arab peasant of some fifty odd years was chatting and laughing gaily with those around him, by whom he was evidently regarded with the respect due to a prominent citizen of distinguished antecedents.

“Oh, he is mighty proud of the feat, I can tell you,” said our informing friend. “He has often talked about it to me with perfect freedom and even complacency, as a soldier fights his battles o’er again. Indeed, he is a little inclined to ‘gas’ about his knowledge of the treasures hidden under these hills, as though he had had the run of every tomb that they contain. When, for instance, he was told the other day of that magnificent batch of blue scarabs that Professor Flinders Petrie has just turned up he received the news with the ineffably superior smile of the man who could have laid his own hand on

the Professor's 'find' any day had it not been for the unworthy espionage of the police."

"You think that's mere swagger, do you? Isn't it possible that he may have discovered more tombs than he ever confessed to?"

"Well, he himself never confessed to any. It was his dear brother Mohammed who performed that act of repentance on his behalf."

"But did Mohammed make an absolutely clean breast of it, do you think?"

"Probably not. An Arab seldom performs that operation with completeness, either in the moral or in the physical sense. But it is fourteen years, you must remember, since the confession was made; and during the last few years, at any rate, we have been digging pretty industriously out here. So that I imagine we have opened up everything that the Abd-er-Rasûl family could have known of, and more to boot."

"How did they first light upon the tombs?"

“Well, that is a part of the story that the guide-books don't give. You must get that, as I did, from the excellent Ahmed himself. It is rather quaint and characteristic, and may be taken, I think, with a somewhat smaller grain of salt than is usually required as the condiment of an Oriental story. It seems that Ahmed, his elder brother, and a stranger were digging one day up in the hills there, when——”

“Do you mean actually digging for buried treasure?”

“Well, yes, I suppose so, in a sort of way. That is to say, they were ‘mousing’ about in the usual Arab fashion, in search of anything that might turn up in the ‘antika’ line, and be worth anything from half a dozen piastres to twice as many pounds. But, of course, he could not have had the slightest expectation of hitting on the biggest find in money's worth, and incomparably the largest in scientific value, that has ever been made in these regions since modern history began.

Well, they struck a shaft obviously of many feet deep, which might either have belonged to a disused and buried well, or, as I dare say the 'cutest of the party suspected, might lead to a rock-hewn tomb. Ahmed volunteered to descend and explore it. He was lowered by a rope, and at the bottom found himself facing a passage, which he entered and followed—not, I dare say, as far as it has since been found to lead, but far enough to make Ahmed Abd-er-Rasûl's heart beat and perhaps his mouth water. There was enough to show him that he had struck a vast mortuary full of the costly death-gifts of the great. It is immensely to his credit as a man of coolness and resource that he was not so overcome by his extraordinary discovery as to be unable to conceal it from his companions. Calm and alert of judgment even in the presence of all this buried wealth, he instantly conceived a dodge for doing his brother and his 'pal' out of their share. He hurried back to the bottom of the shaft and

called to them in an agitated voice to draw him up at once, and on reaching the surface of the earth informed them in tones of horror that he had seen an Afrît."

"Seen a what?"

"An Afrît, an evil spirit. There is no Psychical Society among the Arabs, you know. They are not curious about ghosts. They are simply afraid of them, and give them as wide a berth as possible."

"I see; Ahmed's little ruse was intended to discourage further excavations on that particular spot?"

"Exactly; but observe the thoroughness of his dispositions. It evidently occurred to him that his brother or the other man might on further reflection consider the Afrît story too 'thin,' so after dark that very same night he returned on donkey-back to the spot, accompanied by his wife, whom, like a wise man, he took into his confidence, and, arriving at the shaft, he dismounted and threw the wretched creature—I need hardly say I mean

the donkey—to the bottom of it, a distance of about forty feet.”

“With the view of?”

“With the view of giving colour—or perhaps I should say odour—to the story that an Afrît, who, I should tell you, always manifests his presence by an intolerable stench, was really the tenant of this underground abode.”

“By Jove! it was a rather elaborate and expensive way of creating a nuisance.”

“Yes, but effective. A few days after the donkey’s death there was no one in the neighbourhood who was not firmly convinced that an unclean spirit lived at the bottom of the shaft. Having allowed a decent interval of mourning to elapse, Ahmed again descended into the shaft, removed the decomposing remains of the donkey, covered up the hole, and marked the spot; and then there began for him that lucrative business in valuable ‘antîkas’ to which his brother was afterwards admitted, and as to the details of which are they not

written in the books of Baedeker and Budge? The little game lasted for several years—long enough, at any rate, to enable Ahmed to lay by a comfortable provision for his old age, though, no doubt, he must have sold many things at prices vastly below their real value.”

“I never could quite make out how the ‘find’ was found out by the authorities.”

“Well, the wonder to me is that it was not spotted before. There surely must have been some of the mummy ornaments, sepulchral vessels, and so forth, which bore the signatures of the dead to whom they belonged, and thereby proved that the seller or the person from whom he acquired them must have obtained access to some hitherto unknown tomb. However, it was the funeral papyrus of Queen Netemet, of the twenty-first dynasty—a scroll taken straight from that lady’s tomb—which put Egyptologists on the scent, and finally enabled them to run the ingenious Ahmed to earth. However, they wouldn’t have managed

it so easily, even as it was, if it hadn't been for the fraternal assistance of brother Mohammed."

"Ahmed was game, was he?"

"As a pebble: The Mudir of Keneh had him under lock and key for weeks, and subjected him to a most severe interrogation. Ahmed still points with pride to the record of it on the soles of his feet. But they never got anything out of him. That was in the summer of 1880, and in the winter of that year his elder brother stepped round to the Mudirate, and, if you will excuse an Arabic expression, 'blew the gaff.' Then, as we all know, M. Maspero took the matter in hand, and Brugsch Bey made his expedition to the spot in the sweltering July heats of 1881 and—but why inflict guide-book upon you? Every one has read the famous Egyptologist's graphic account of this most stupendous of all archæological 'finds'—how he made his way along the passage from the bottom of the shaft pointed out to him by the reluctant

Ahmed, and what his sensations were on finding himself in the marvellous death-chamber and treasure-house at its end, every inch of it covered with coffins and antiquities of all kinds ; ‘ My astonishment was so overpowering that I scarcely knew whether I was awake or whether it was only a mocking dream. Resting on a coffin, in order to recover from my intense excitement, I mechanically cast my eyes over the coffin-lid, and distinctly saw the name of King Seti I., the father of Rameses II., both belonging to the nineteenth dynasty. A few steps further on, in a simple wooden coffin, with his hands crossed on his breast, lay Rameses II., the great Sesostris himself. The further I advanced the greater was the wealth displayed, here Amenophis I., there Amasis, the three Thothmes, Queen Ahmes Nefertari, all the mummies well preserved—thirty-six coffins, all belonging to kings or queens or princes or princesses.”

“ Yes,” said one of the listeners, “ but even

that part of the story is not so remarkable as the incident of the fellahin women following the boat containing the royal mummies down the river with their hair loosened and filling the air with lamentations."

"Strange," murmured another of our party, "that these old kings should have kept the treasures of their tombs inviolate for thousands of years only to be rifled at last by an Arab villager! And it is the more wonderful when one remembers that many centuries must have passed before these sepulchres were finally covered up and hidden by the desert sands, and that during all that time their position and their riches contained in them must have been matters of common knowledge. It says much for the honesty and piety of the early Egyptians that they seem never to have——"

"My dear fellow!" interrupted our friend, who had been listening to this rhapsody with a queer smile; "Don't say another word. Let me remind you of that pregnant

remark which Sir Peter Teazle makes in the last act of the 'School for Scandal.' "

"What pregnant remark?"

"'It's a damned wicked world, Sir Oliver, and the fewer people we praise the better.' I advise you to exercise a certain caution in extolling the honesty and piety of the early Egyptians or, at any rate, in congratulating them on their universal innocence of the crime of tomb-robbing."

"You don't mean to say that this particular form of sacrilegious burglary is an ancient——"

"Only just upon three thousand years old. The earliest recorded case was about 1100 B.C."

"Recorded?"

"Yes, to be sure. Ask some Egyptologist to give you a translation of the passages about it in the Abbott and Amherst papyri. You will find enough there to convince you that the early Egyptians knew a thing or two about mummy-snatching, and that

Ahmed Abd-er-Rasûl is a mere modern plagiarist."

And so it proved to be. For here, furnished me by the kindness of Mr. Percy Newberry, the accomplished archæologist who has done such admirable work for the Egypt Exploration Society, is the translated record of this oldest of old-world criminal investigations. "It was found," reported the commissioners of inquiry into an alleged desecration of the Royal tombs, "that the thieves had violated it" (the tomb of King Sebekensanef and his consort) "by boring through the principal chamber of the sepulchre of Neb-Amon, the Superintendent of the Granaries of King Thothmes III. The place of sepulture was found to be without its occupant. So was the Chamber of the Royal wife, Nubkhas. The thieves had laid hands on them."

The tomb-robbers, as the public, even at this considerable distance of time, will, no doubt, learn with satisfaction, were ultimately

captured and brought to justice. And here, from the Amherst papyrus, is the record of their trial. It appears that they were eight in number, most of them servants in the Temple of Amon, and, having been "examined," or, in other words, "beaten with sticks both on their hands and feet"—precisely the same form of "question" it will be seen, as was applied to Abd-er-Rasûl—one of them confessed to the theft. "We broke into the passage," said this sacrilegious Sikes of the age of Rameses IX., "and found the tomb protected and surrounded by masonry and covered with roofing. This we destroyed and found the King's and Queen's mummies inside. We then opened their sarcophagi and the coffins in which they lay. We found the King with his axe beside him and a long chain of golden amulets about his neck. His head was covered with gold, and the mummy was entirely overlaid with gold, and his coffin was burnished with gold and silver, both

inside and out, and inlaid with all kinds of precious stones. We took the gold which we found and the amulets and ornaments that were round his neck. We found the Royal consort, and we likewise took all that we found with her, and we set fire to their coffins and stole their furniture which we found with them, vases of gold, of silver, and of bronze, and divided them into eight lots."

Here, unfortunately, the record breaks off, so we do not know what punishment was inflicted on the desperate villains who thus confessed to an offence which the orthodox Egyptian of ancient times must have regarded with unspeakable horror. But the more remote sequel of these proceedings is pretty well ascertained, and is, in itself, curious. For it was, no doubt, the increasing audacity and success of the tomb-robbers which some hundred years later induced the priests to transfer the Royal mummies from their original resting-place

at Biban-el-Mulûk to the crypt in which they were ultimately found by Ahmed-Abd-er-Rasûl three thousand years later. Thus did Time and Fate conspire to mock these mighty kings with a temporary prolongation of the sanctity of their tomb-treasures, withdrawing them from the reverent explorer only to leave them at the mercy of the robber. And thus does one resurrection-man stretch out his unscrupulous hand to another across the centuries.

CHAPTER X

AN AQUATIC INDUSTRY

EVERY great river begets its own peculiar industries which may vary indefinitely in dignity and emolument, as, for instance, from the occupation of the boat-builders who let steam-launches on the Upper Thames, to that of the mudlarks who scramble for coppers in the ooze at Greenwich. The Nile itself is not without its children of this description, though the simple life of the dwellers on its banks does much, of course, to restrict their number. There is no brisk demand for pleasure-boats among the fellahs of the Nile Valley, and even ferries do not seem much in demand, as one might have expected. For countless generations, in fact, the toiling cultivator can have known little or

nothing of the great river on whose banks he lives save in its sole aspect of the beneficent helpmeet in his labours. He knows it in its annual bounty of rich alluvium, and as the great reservoir from which, at vast expenditure of labour, he irrigates his plot of land ; but otherwise he recks little of it, and asks nothing save that it shall offer its broad bosom to the heavy-laden lateen-sailed grain-boats that bear his produce to the market.

See him as he bends at the *shadûf* with which, unchanged in form and mechanic principle, his forefathers of three thousand years ago drew water under the Pharoahs. Spare, graceful, active, trained "to fiddlestrings," and looking as fit to run for his life as the fleetest and most Mercury-like of those *sâises* who do actually run for their living before the carriages of the "quality" at Cairo, behold him, one of two, sometimes one of three or four, men engaged together hour after hour in the monotonous and, to a European, the heart-breaking labour of watering a plain with

a vessel about the size of a stable bucket. Imagination can conceive nothing more primitive than the process or more rude than the appliance by which the work is performed. The wooden lever from one end of which the bucket is suspended, hangs midway in its length upon a thick upright which serves as a fulcrum; the end at which the power is applied is weighted with nothing more elaborate than a large lump of sun-dried mud. The steep bank is terraced in one, two, or three places, according to its height, by a rough-cut ledge or ledges, of only a few feet in breadth, and hollowed out to form a shallow tank. Into this tank the labourer at the water's edge empties the bucket which he has just filled from the river, and from the tank his comrade or comrades ladle it by the same rudimentary leverage at one or more stages, as the case may be, to the top of the bank, for diffusion over the soil. In its utter simplicity, in its profound yet contented inadequacy, the whole operation is pathetic in

the highest degree. It is the childhood of Labour appealing for assistance to the infancy of Mechanics. On one side the mighty volume of moving water; on the other the far-stretching belt of tilth and verdure, and between them these two or three patient adscripts of the glebe emptying spoonfuls of the one upon acres of the other.

For a full hour I have stood watching the toiler on the lowest shelf of that *shadûf*. It is past noon and he has stood there, like enough, since sunrise. Three or four times in every minute he draws down one end of the lever till the bucket is immersed, fills it, steadies the full vessel as, with the descent of the weighted lever, it ascends to the level of the tank at his shoulder, empties it with his disengaged hand and stoops again for another bucketful. His movements repeat themselves with the regularity of a machine ; but there is the perfect ease and living grace of strong, untiring manhood in every stoop and recovery of his supple frame. He is in

much too "hard condition" to perspire, but he is plentifully besprinkled with the splashes from the tank. His toes dabble in the river mud; the loin cloth, which is his only garment, has become a sodden rag; but he works on cheerily, wet and warm in the delicious air, and fanned by that desert breeze which would leave him as dry as a biscuit if he paused for five minutes in his work. His rhythmic motions are so springy and elastic, his countenance is so placid and painless, his harmony with his surroundings is so complete, his understanding with his work so thorough, that one might almost see in him the original of that Perfectly Contented Man of Eastern story, whom the emissaries of the Sultan sought everywhere far and wide that their master might wear his shirt and be healed, and on whom at last they lighted—to find him shirtless, like this one, but not perhaps more free from care. For what, after all, is there to trouble him? The times are good; he is sure of his simple daily meal of

rice and sugar-cane, sure of the tax in hand when the collector comes round, sure, above all, that so long as the English redcoats are at Cairo once paying it will be enough, and that, come what may, the soles of those muddy feet of his have nothing to fear from the bamboo.

But this, after all, is no aquatic industry in the ordinary sense of the word. The Nile is to him but a huge reservoir which once a year beneficially bursts and provides him with soil for the planting of his crops, but from which afterwards he must pump long and patiently ere he can raise and gather them. As a river or a waterway for navigation his concern with it ceases, and he does not attempt to eke out his livelihood by the practice of any art upon its stream. Nor, indeed, do any of the riparian population lower down than Assouan—or not now at least since the enterprising inmates of the Coptic monastery at Gebel-el-Tayr have discontinued their peculiar method of seeking

contributions to the support of their brotherhood. Formerly it was the practice of these "religious" to dive from the rock on which their monastery is situated, and swim out to the passing steamer or dahabiyeh to solicit *bakshîsh*. It seems a pity that so picturesque and adventurous a custom should have been put an end to by the Patriarch of the Coptic Church ; but, after all, one can hardly wonder at his disapproval of it. If the minor clergy of the riparian parishes of the Upper Thames took to diving, scantily clad, into the river, and importuning the occupants of house-boats for aid to the Curates' Augmentation Fund, it is eminently probable that their diocesan would interfere. Anyhow the monks of Gebel-el-Tayr take their headers no longer, and an aquatic industry of an absolutely unique character has in consequence disappeared from the Nile. Nor is it till we reach the First Cataract that we meet with another, of somewhat the same description, and almost if not quite as extraordinary—an

industry which fears the frown of no Patriarch, and which so long as European tourists throng to the Upper Nile and human nature remains unaltered, may be regarded as pretty certain to endure. Yet its existence, were it not for the marplot guide-books which discount half the delightful surprises of a new country—as dramatic critics do of a new play—might well be unsuspected until it confronts you in full activity.

You have taken, let us say, the first and favourite expedition from Assuân. That is to say, you have ridden over the flat strip of desert that divides you from Philæ to that most beautiful of islands; you have duly admired the gem-like little ruin that crowns its precipitous sides; you have thoroughly explored the Temple of Isis; too probably, you have desecrated that beautiful kiosk by lunching on “Pharaoh’s bed”; and then, having started for that row home through the smaller rapids, which is somewhat grandiloquently described as “shooting the cataract,”

you are landed at a rocky point on the left bank of the river, and find yourself unexpectedly—or what would be unexpectedly were it not for the marplots aforesaid—in presence of the singular aquatic industry of which I have spoken.

At your feet some couple of fathoms below you races the First Cataract, no genuine “waterfall” even here at its point of greatest force and volume, but only a pretty swift, tolerably deep, and very moderately steep rapid. Here, where it is at its steepest, the river twists round a sharpish corner, and descends to a level some thirty or forty feet lower by a gradient of, say, fifty or sixty yards in length. This incline of one in five or so can hardly be considered very abrupt for a river, whatever it might be for a road ; and, indeed, the so-called cataract is merely a brisk and lively, but in no sense a formidable, or even an imposing, water-race. “At this rate,” it was remarked, “we have rivers in Scotland which are pretty nearly all cataract” ; and you

are marvelling greatly to yourself at that union of Eastern cupidity and Western fatuity which has fixed the boatman's tariff for shooting this "one-horse" cataract at from £10 to £12, when lo! you find yourself suddenly surrounded by a swarm of Nubians, clad in blue bathing *caleçons* of an almost laconic brevity, but otherwise in a state of natal nakedness. Some of them are leaning on light, though bulky, logs of the dom-palm; others—and these for the most part the younger and more vigorous—rely solely upon their own limbs and muscles for the successful practice of their industry. There must be a good deal more than a score of them, all told, and they range in age from here and there a white-polled blackamoor who looks well on in the sixties, down to a sable urchin of not more than ten or twelve. But however they may vary in age, in one respect, at any rate, they are unvarying—in their hunger and thirst after the piastre.

What common impulse prompted them to

plunge with one accord into the Nile in pursuit of it it would be difficult to determine. A hint from some curious spectator, a mere nod from the dragoman of a party would no doubt suffice; but anyhow, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole herd of amphibia are in the water together. The palm-log men have scampered off a few yards up stream to get a better launching place; the swimmers, old and young, simply take headers from the top of the ten-foot bank, or flop like seals into the water from some lower perch, and in a few seconds a dozen woolly heads are being swept at racing speed in mid-torrent toward the brow of the water slope, while half a dozen black bodies astride on palm logs drift more sedately in their rear.

For a moment they appear as though suspended on the summit of the watery declivity and then over—and under—they go. For some seconds scarcely the head of a single swimmer is to be seen. The suck of the under-current has drawn them down; but

soon the jet black knobs come bobbing up again like so many burnt corks some twenty yards down the river ; and then, while the “log-rollers” drift away still further down stream in search of a smoother landing-place, every swimmer—for is not *bakshîsh* limited and time of importance?—turns over in an instant towards the left bank. Every pair of arms is flung out of the water and set revolving like a couple of paddle wheels in the effort of cutting across the powerful current, and one by one they spring ashore and race each other up the bank to where we are standing, their heaving flanks and quivering nostrils telling plainly enough of the exertion of their brief but sharp struggle with the river. Their fuzzy wigs seem to curl tighter than ever for their dip, and in the brilliant afternoon their wet bodies gleam like burnished bronze. For strength and symmetry and inches, for natural grace of pose and splendid ease of movement, some of these cataract shooters are unsurpassable. Look at that

youth of twenty or thereabouts who is approaching us and say what he reminds you of. Truly, you need but to clap a negroid skull with a Nubian nose and lips on that noble Perseus of Cellini who stands in bronze before the Loggia dei Lanzi at Florence holding the dripping Gorgon's head in his hand and you have him!

The African demigod advances with hand outstretched; he wants a piastre. If half a dozen of us unwieldy and ill-shapen Westerns would each contribute a sum equal to twopence halfpenny English his display of god-like strength and skill would seem to him amply rewarded. But alas! the supply even of such "ridiculously small" coins is limited, and these divine athletes reverse the proportion between the harvest and the reapers in the parable. They are many in number, from the aged man who is a little "out of it" among his younger competitors in the hunt for *bakshîsh*, to the urchin at whose precocious pluck you have been wondering, till

you reflect how excellent a training for the nerves of childhood it must be to have been carried down the cataract on the shoulders of your big brother from as early a date of your life as you can recall. The piastre hunt is soon concluded *tant bien que mal*, and the hunters are ready to try their luck a second time. Again there is a sudden stampede to the water's edge ; again the headers from the high bank, and the flop-flopping of the shiny-coated little seals from the lower ledges, and away once more goes the flying procession of woolly pates down the water-race, now visible, now whelmed, until the deepest and swiftest swathes of hurrying water bury them and foam over them, and jerk them up to the surface again in the stiller pools below.

Well, it is an occupation like another, though to be sure it is not very like any other that is commonly practised in the West. Still there are points of resemblance, moral if not physical, between it and certain well reputed and indeed eminently respectable

pursuits of civilised man. The life of the Nubian cataract shooter is, of course, more picturesque, more highly coloured than that of the English man of business who goes to the City every morning by 'bus or Underground ; but the nature of his industry after one or other of those conveyances has deposited him in the neighbourhood of Capel Court, has often more points of resemblance to that of the poor benighted African brother than he might care to admit. Shooting the cataract is unquestionably a more or less "casual" kind of business to go into ; it would not supply a prudent father with an entirely satisfactory answer to the question : "What to do with our boys." You cannot "plunge" every day in the Nile with a prospect of profit, as you can on the Stock Exchange. Nay, you cannot even seek your own market for yourself ; it is necessary to await its coming to you at the uncertain intervals which separate dahabiyehs if not tourist steamers from each other. Yet some-

how this band of Nubian swimmers and "log-rollers" are always on the spot.

Where do they spring from? Who knows? No one whom we asked could tell. There is no village visible; for aught that appears the spot is miles from any human habitation. Yet just as neither man nor beast can die in the desert but within a few minutes those tiny specks which are to grow into vultures appear mysteriously on the horizon, so the European tourists cannot show in any force in the neighbourhood of this rocky bend, but straightway the desert sand is dotted with the black nude figures of these singular athletes ready and eager to plunge into a torrent and be whirled down a water-slope for little more than what an English working man would call the "price of a pint."

CHAPTER XI

A RAIDED VILLAGE

IT is a scattered Nubian hamlet of some forty or fifty houses, with one larger building, the abode of the local Sheikh, conspicuous in its midst. Behind it stretch the long levels of the Arabian Desert, and somewhat further in its rear arises a barren ridge of hills to a height of some three or four hundred feet. The Nile, here broad and peaceful, stealing smoothly down to its rocky prison at Bab-el-Kalabshi, has edged the little village with a narrow strip of its richly fertile soil, now thickly covered with green-leaved shrubs of the *kiki* and sweet with flowering beans. Between us and the river, as we pass along the broken line of mud-cabins, stand the cattle-pens of the peasantry, no longer, thanks

to timely aid from the Administration, entirely denuded of their stock. Goats and sheep are not wanting, and here and there, through the wattled fences of dura, we catch glimpses of horned cattle. It is just an ordinary Nubian village, such as one passes in scores on both banks of the river between the Cataracts ; yet we approach it in a very different mood of mind from that in which we should enter any of its neighbours. Indeed, our very debarcation on a spot so like a thousand others in Upper Egypt is enough in itself to keep its object continually before our minds, and the constant presence of our military escort is not needed to refresh our memories.

From the First Cataract upwards we have been "shadowed" by this sable bodyguard from a Soudanese regiment, each with an honest, round, blubber-lipped face, as black and shiny as a patent-leather boot, but tall, strapping, well-set-up fellows, making as brave a show in their blue and yellow jackets

and red sashes as the heart of man or woman could desire. We have eight and twenty of them all told, six men and a non-commissioned officer to each of our four boats. Their duty is to guard the bodies of us helpless tourists from Assuân to Wady Halfa, and they perform it with a fidelity so conscientious as to become almost comic. The temples of this part of Upper Egypt are most of them conveniently near the shore, a climb of a few score feet, or a walk of a few hundred yards being usually all that is necessary to reach them. Swift as are its movements, a band of Dervishes could hardly descend upon us rapidly enough to cut us off from our boats. Nevertheless, there stand our black men-at-arms ready even for this emergency. A couple of them mount guard at the landing-place, two others accompany the sight-seers up the bank, a third pair we find waiting for us at the doors of the temple. In the early morning, when the stern-wheeler has been tied up to the

bank the previous night, you may dimly descry one of them doing sentry-go along the dusty shore. At the great rock-temple of Abu Simbel he was to be seen patrolling one of the lower ledges of the sandstone rock, in front of the four gigantic Colossi, looming awful in the dawn-light, with a peculiarly weird effect. At the end of the hour's ride into the desert, which must be taken to reach the rock of Abu Sîr, with its view of the Second Cataract, you note the figure of a black soldier silhouetted against the sky on every rocky knoll around you—a look-out man on the watch for any approaching troop of men, visible as they would be for leagues of distance over this boundless waste.

On board our trusty Soudanese appear to pass their time cheerily enough in their quarters on the lower deck, where one may find the men who have been on guard during the night now sleeping like so many logs of black bog-oak, while their comrades sit cross-

legged, cigarettes between their ample lips, chattering gaily to each other as they clean their Martinis or furbish up the brass of their belts. This week on the Nile is for them, no doubt, a pleasant little outing ; but, still, it is, of course, a serious business also, and not by any means intended merely as a treat, so to speak, for a good soldier boy.

No boat, neither tourist steamer, mail-boat, nor steam dahabiyeh, is at present allowed to navigate the Nile between the First and Second Cataracts without an escort. As to sailing dahabiyehs, the Sirdar has stopped them altogether. Dependent as they are on the wind and unable to moor for the night in mid-stream, they would be at the absolute mercy of any predatory horde that chose to descend upon them, while to give military protection to them all would, of course, be impossible. And landing, as we have done, for the purpose of visiting the scene of a murderous raid committed by the Dervishes not much more than a month ago, we are

naturally better able than we otherwise should be to appreciate the need of these precautions.

Still, one finds it hard to believe that this quiet little village, lapped as it is now in the sleepy peace of a glowing tropical forenoon, has so lately been given over to rapine and bloodshed, and that seventeen corpses of its innocent, feeble folk, shot or speared by these savage robber-fanatics of the desert, were so short a time ago laid out in the dust of the little village square to await the inspection and examination of those to whom this duty belongs. Assuredly there is nothing to indicate it in the demeanour of the survivors. The little train of villagers which has attended us as we march ankle-deep through the soft, hot sand increases but slightly in bulk with our progress, and is rather more apathetic than an ordinary crowd of fellaheen. They do not even beg for *bakshîsh*, so primitive is their civilisation. It is indeed more than possible that they have never seen a body of European tourists

before, for "the season" above the First Cataract is barely a fortnight old, and the calamity which has singled out the inhabitants of Atandan from all the other nameless groups of their fellow peasants along the Nile is itself not very much older.

But their tongues are soon unloosed when they know the object of our visit, and the information which they are all of them ready to pour out at once into the ears of our interpreter leaves nothing to be desired in point of quantity at any rate. Like the common people in all countries, they are proud of their tragic experience, and would not for a moment think of sparing us a single horror. Yes, it was just here that they slaughtered seven of us, and here—pointing to a wide-eyed Nubian boy with a ring through his left nostril—is the son of one of those whom they slew. This was his house ; and we stoop our heads to pass under the low doorway of the hovel. A mud hut is not exactly a decorative building anywhere in the world ; but to the inhabitants of

Western countries it carries with it associations of squalor and misery which unfairly, though naturally, prepossess him against its Eastern counterpart. You soon perceive, however, that in a land of scorching heat and in an atmosphere of intense dryness mud is a much more eligible building material than you had supposed. There is nothing of the poverty-stricken Irish cabin about this Nubian hut. Its interior, furnished only with a low truckle bed, and otherwise, indeed, entirely empty, save for a barrel of meal and a little heap of fruit and vegetables in a corner, is well swept, well kept, and deliciously cool, and though lacking windows not wanting them, since the narrow streams of brilliant sunshine that filter here and there through its dura thatch serve all the purposes of lighting and ventilation.

In short, it is a typical Egyptian peasant's home, pathetically bare and rude to the eye of a dweller in great cities, but comfortable enough, no doubt, for the inhabitant of a land where nature is so royally bountiful of light

and warmth that man owes little even to the most rudimentary of the arts of life. Such as it was, at any rate it held all that life had for its simple peasant owner, and it sufficed. Probably his small and quiet world wagged well enough with him till that fatal afternoon in December, 1895, when he heard shouts and shots in the street of his village, and stepped out, or, more likely, perhaps, was dragged out to his cruel death.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when these desert-wolves swooped down on this wretched flock. This is the first thing that we gather from the son of the Sheikh, to whom a brisk member of our party, who suddenly develops the gifts of a heaven-born examiner-in-chief, proceeds to put a series of very pertinent questions. It is investigation under difficulties, since the English vocabulary of our worthy dragoman is not extensive, neither is his speech fluent; but on the whole we make out enough to satisfy any reasonable mind that the raid was really the work

of Dervishes, and not, as certain wiseacres of Cairo would have had us believe, of some mere wandering tribe of, so to speak, private banditti.

“From which direction did they come?” is one of the first questions asked of our witness, and “From over there” is the answer, as the young fellow points to the rocky ridge in the background. “Were they dressed alike?” he is next asked, the object being to ascertain whether the men were in the Mahdi’s uniform or in the go-as-you-please costume of a mixed band of freebooters. The reply was “Yes,” and that they wore red turbans. A bugle, adds our informant, was sounded on their approach. They divided themselves into three parties, which re-united again at the sound of the bugle, when their work of plunder and massacre—a business of some three hours—was over.

“How were they armed?” we ask. With spears, we are told; and some of them with

rifles—Remingtons, we afterwards learnt, a weapon with which the Mahdi's soldiers were known to be equipped. Everything, in fact, whether in the appearance of the raiders or in the mode of their advance, attack and retreat, unmistakably pointed to the existence among them of military discipline and organisation; and this last detail about the rifles completed the proof of their identity. It was no longer possible even for the most sceptical to doubt that they were followers of the Khalifa acting under orders from headquarters, and executing what probably was as much a planned demonstration against the English protectors of Egypt as a mere adventure after "loot."

Not but that the raid would have been well worth making for plunder alone. To those who are unfamiliar with the habits of an Oriental peasantry, the amount of the spoil carried off by the robbers from this little settlement of mud cabins may seem well-nigh incredible. It has been estimated

after careful investigation by competent English inquirers at from three hundred to four hundred pounds. Its magnitude is, of course, mainly due, not to the value of the cattle, sheep and other live stock lifted from the village, but to the aggregation of the modest hoards of money found in many of the hovels, and to the silver ornaments of the women.

Nevertheless, to do these ruthless ruffians justice, they doubtless prized the victory higher than its spoils. The joy which swelled their savage hearts as they passed southward home across the desert was not mainly inspired, one may well believe, by thoughts of the booty with which their camels were laden, or of the half-dozen hapless women whom they carried with them, and one of whom was found dead a few days afterwards on the track of their retreat. What, no doubt, fired them with a far fiercer exultation was the consciousness of having for once evaded the vigilance of the English patrols, of having swooped down upon the territory

under our protection, and made their way back again before our troops could cut them off.

The son of the Sheikh having duly deponed, there are, of course, any number of his fellow-villagers ready to take up the dismal tale. We are surrounded, like the Apostle, by a great cloud of witnesses, some of them prepared with exhibits as well as with oral evidence. Will we see Hassan Abdullah? Hassan Abdullah was shot in the neck, but he managed to flee and hide himself, and so by the blessing of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, he escaped. Come forward, Hassan Abdullah, and there stands before us a spare and grizzled old peasant, between the wiry muscles of whose lean brown neck a rifle bullet might certainly stow itself comfortably away without making any external difference in his cervical conformation. Another villager adds a pathetic detail to the story. At a little distance from us can be heard the droning of a *sakkiyeh*,

one of those ancient water-wheels turned by a bullock, which are almost as familiar to the traveller on the Nile as the *shadûf* itself, and which, with their long complaining note—often heard far into the night-watches when the river is falling and time is becoming precious to those who still need water for their lands—might well sound to a fanciful imagination like the secular moan of this patient race of eternal toilers under eternal taskmasters, echoing through the ages. It was on the labourer at the *sakkiyeh* that the Dervishes first lighted as they came down the hill, and whether in mere wantonness of blood-lust or from fear lest he should give the alarm they shot the poor wretch dead beside his water-wheel. The two ideal archetypes of predatory barbarism and of peaceful industry could hardly have come into more dramatic conflict, or have acted and suffered more exactly after their kind. It was the history of Egypt in little—an epitome of the everlasting fate of its timid and defenceless

people, the prey of every spoiler and the victims of every sword.

The *sakkiyeh* is droning and dripping again now after its former wont ; the patient beast that turns it has a new master no less patient and even more spiritless than itself ; the dead have been buried, the wounded have been returned cured from the military hospital at Wady Halfa, where everything was done for them that surgical skill could do ; and the world has resumed its unspeakably slow revolutions in the little Nubian village of Atandan, The stoicism of the Mohammedan superposed upon that blissful apathy of the labourer in all countries which so soon deadens all sense of loss and sorrow for the departed with the numbing anodyne of daily fatigue has already done its work. Except for the occasional pleasure of rehearsing the story of their calamity that revives the villagers' recollection of it, it is probably almost forgotten. The handful of ten-piastre pieces, the yield of a hastily whipped-up subscription, which in

their presence we entrust to the son of the Sheikh, they receive with gratitude, but without effusion. As has already been said, they have not asked for *bakshîsh*, and seemed surprised that strangers should give without being asked. They accompany us, the same placid, listless, little crowd, to the landing-place, and tranquilly look on at our re-embarkation and departure. Perhaps they will watch the steamer till its smoke disappears from view, but then they will go back to their everlasting round of toil and rest and toil again—good human bullocks, turning the *sakkiyeh* of life as untiringly and resignedly as their fathers and their fathers' fathers up to a past that loses itself in the mists of legend.

CHAPTER XII

A BREAKWATER OF BARBARISM

IT is a pretty and peaceful-looking riverside settlement which meets the eye of the traveller up the Nile as he approaches Wady Halfa. A little group of houses, at which the steamer stops to deliver letters, and which has sprung up during the last few years under the protecting shadow of the British garrison, forms his first halting-place; in another ten minutes he has rounded the point behind which lies the military station proper and draws up at the landing-stage hard by the headquarters of the Commandant. A flag flying over the roof of a bungalow surrounded by a garden rich with palms, lebbek and poinsettia, denotes the spot, and but for these signs of tropical

vegetation it might be a sequestered villa on the Upper Thames. A little flight of half a dozen steps leading up to and through its shrubberies from the water's edge to the entrance contributes to the support of the illusion. Some few hundred yards down the river you have passed another long, low building, set parallel instead of transversely to the river, which you judge, and rightly so, to be the officers' mess-room. Otherwise, there is nothing to show that you have reached a frontier "stronghold" of Egypt.

The place effectually hides its military character from this point of approach. It turns its warlike face away from the river and towards the desert, and looks out only with the air of a smiling village over the broad and tranquil Nile. Yet this is Wady Halfa, the finger-tip, so to speak, of the arm of British protective power in Egypt, and as true a breakwater of barbarism as any that is to be found on the face of the globe. For here, to every pacific and law-abiding culti-

vator of the soil within the Khedive's dominion—here is the limit of peace, order, and security in the Nile Valley: beyond is chaos. South of this position, or, at any rate, south of that more southward zone which a salutary fear of the Halfa garrison and its patrols keeps clear of the marauder, lies a country tenanted or scoured by tribes whose business is robbery and whose pastime murder, and who seek nothing better than a chance such as they found made for themselves the other day at Atandan, of swooping down on a defenceless village, slaying as many of its inhabitants as they come across, and making off with as much booty as they can lay their hands upon. Against these desert wolves there is nothing but the British soldier-shepherd to protect the Egyptian peasant-sheep, and very vigilant, very rarely evaded, that protection is.

It is not many weeks, however, since these prowling ravagers slipped within the line of our guard—if that shadowy cordon, which,

of course, it is impossible to stretch along so many miles of river, can properly or fairly be so called—and very evident is the natural soreness displayed by our genial hosts at the recollection of the incident. Their feeling on the subject is eminently characteristic, and well brings out the everlasting contrast between Oriental apathy and the strenuous energy of the West. The task which has been set to these British officers—that of policing some two hundred miles of absolutely exposed river-bank from two stations, one at each end of the line—is an impracticable one, and they know it. Yet they devote themselves to it with a cheerful and untiring activity which refreshes one to witness, and they are far more restless under occasional illustrations of its impossibility than the people who suffer from the fact. If ever there were a case when the “Kismet” which amply satisfies the victims of a robber raid in these regions might do consolation-duty for their baffled protectors it is that of

the descent on the village of Atandan. Yet our officers at Wady Halfa are quite unable to take that view of the incident. They discussed it freely enough, and with a frank military admiration mingling with their disgust.

“It was really not half a bad performance for dervishes,” said the staff officer, with whom we were conversing about it. “They came from a distance of over a hundred miles, and across a country without wells, and they got safe back again with their booty, and without losing a man. Yes, it was a very well organised and well executed piece of work.”

“How long did it take them to sack the unfortunate village?”

“Well, that would only be a work of two or three hours; but it was getting back on to their own ground, and beyond the risk of our cutting them off—it was that which was the difficulty.”

“They cut the telegraph wires, didn’t they?”

“Oh, yes, of course. They always commence operations in that way. But still they wouldn't have got anything like so long a start as they did if it had not been for the villagers themselves. The fellows who were despatched to this place to give us information of the raid actually put up for the night on their way here, and we didn't get the news till the next morning. What can you do with a people so ‘casual’ as that?”

It did seem a little easy-going, to be sure. One tried to imagine the Malise of Scott's poem stopping at a Highland inn, interrupting his wild career through the glens, with “danger, death, and deadly deed” behind him, for a cosy supper and a bed.

When the messengers did at last arrive the troops of the garrison were, it seems, engaged in manœuvring—“Egyptian Army resisting an attack of Dervishes,” being the order of the day's programme, and a droll misunderstanding occurred. “The Dervishes have captured a village, sir,” was the breath-

less announcement made to the commanding officer watching the evolutions of the combatants; and "All right" was the natural reply. "So much the better for the officer in command of them." It was, of course, some little time before the two armies could be generally apprised of the fact that it was a question of real and not of sham Dervishes, and that they must unite forces in pursuit of the common enemy, who, thanks to the leisurely proceedings of the villagers, were by that time well on their way back to their base of operations.

"It was too many hours' start to give the rascals," said our informant, regretfully.

We expressed the surprise of ignorance at its being possible to give them any start at all. Surely a tribe whose business is "robbery under arms," would be as well mounted as a clan of Border-reivers in the old cattle-lifting days. The camels of a band of raiding Dervishes ought to be a match for any others.

"Wait till you have seen ours," replied

our friend, with a smile. "Our camel-corps are mounted on the finest animals to be obtained anywhere in the African desert. In fact, most people who come to Egypt don't really know what a camel is, and is capable of, until they have paid us a visit. There is as much difference between a cavalry camel of the first quality and the unkempt and ungainly brutes that shamble backwards and forwards between the Pyramids and the Mena House Hotel as there is between a cart-horse and a thoroughbred. But look! Here come some of the camel-corps back from exercise. We have not got such a good show to-day as we should have liked to give you, but you can almost see the difference in their way of 'going,' even at this distance."

Under a dense cloud of the desert dust two considerable detachments of camel-cavalry were seen approaching us at the trot, which by the time they had got abreast of us had slackened into a walk. Truly, there was no exaggeration in the praises to

which we had been listening. The difference between what may be called the camel of commerce and this humped charger was immense, astonishing, to any one who has not seen it almost incredible. It was the difference between a slouching, morose, and ragged street loafer and the same man set up and smartened into the well-drilled soldier of a crack regiment. The camel of commerce, as we most of us know him, is a coarse-haired, untidy brute, knock-kneed and awkward-gaited, with a sullen, if not vindictive, expression of countenance, and a coat all tags and tufts. But these were clean-limbed and comely creatures, with skins that shone like satin in the evening sun. They carried their heads as if they were proud of them, and planted their feet with neatness and precision, keeping step as perfectly as the chargers of a troop of cavalry. Merely to see them walk was enough to dispel all doubts as to their ability to ourstrip any animal that a Dervish is likely to be

bestriding. And as for drill and discipline, we soon have an opportunity of judging of their efficiency in those respects when we follow our guide to the camping-ground and see scores of these usually unmanageable animals kneeling down in long rows at the word of command before the shallow trenches in which the men have placed for them their evening meal.

"We keep a detachment of the Camel Corps in a condition to take the field, you might almost say, at a moment's notice," another officer told us. "Rations for the men, forage for the beasts, arms and ammunition—everything in constant readiness. In less than half an hour after the order was given they would be on the march."

We looked along the lines of crouching and feeding camels, with their sturdy, sable Soudanese riders standing motionless behind them—the picture of organised efficiency—and we could well understand the present inclination of the Dervishes to give

them as wide a berth as possible. The Khalifa's followers have had lessons in that wisdom since the severe one which they received at Toski in 1889. A year or two ago the country around Wady Halfa was alive with them, and though they never actually attacked our position, they had the audacity to threaten it. But since then they have been so effectually cleared out that this sudden excursion upon a Nubian village well to the north of the frontier which we defend was a peculiarly irritating surprise. It is the more so because, for political and other reasons, reprisals are out of the question.

"The watch-dog," observed one of our officers, with some bitterness, "is, unfortunately, tied. He is allowed to go only to the length of his chain, and then he is pulled up."

Obviously, therefore, if the thief can only get start enough to save his calves he gets off scot free. Yet, on the other hand,

one sees the futility of any temporary slipping of the collar. The watch-dog sees it himself. There would not be the slightest difficulty in chastising the perpetrators of this raid by a descent upon the district from which they came. But what would be the use? "We should probably kill 5 per cent. of the men who were concerned in it," observed a high official of the Intelligence Department, "and 95 per cent. of people who have no more to do with it than you or I." There is nothing to be done but to keep "pegging away" at patrol work, and trust to catching the Dervishes in the very act on their next attempt. It may not be long before the opportunity occurs, for the Dervishes, one hears, are full of elation at their recent success. They could hardly be "more cock-a-whoop," one of our friends puts in, "if they had sacked Cairo." They are boasting, it is believed, that it takes the camel corps of the infidels six hours to mobilise. It is the eager hope of every man in the garrison of Wady

Halfa that they will soon test the accuracy of this calculation.

In talk of this kind the golden afternoon wears away in a still, starry, tropical night. Dinner awaits us at the hospitable mess-room looking over the moon-lit Nile, and it is time to bring our walk through the camp to a close. To-morrow we set our faces to the north once more, and leave behind us this furthest outpost of civilisation in Northern Africa, with its garrison of stalwart blacks, and their cheery young English officers, keeping inviolate the Pax Britannica, even as their spiritual fathers in history kept the Roman Peace on those distant barriers of their empire against which, until the day of its decline, the insurging tides of barbarism beat so long in vain.

CHAPTER XIII

OF PALMS AND SUNSETS

IF any one were to say that the scenery of the Nile Valley from Cairo to Assuân is monotonous, I wonder what would be the proper reply to him. For that matter, indeed, one may well wonder what is the proper reply to anybody who says that anything is monotonous. What is monotony? Is it a quality of the object perceived or of the percipient subject? Is it in the seer or in the seen? If we endeavour to assign an objective origin to it we soon find ourselves in the cleft-stick of the alternative conclusions either that all is monotony or that nothing is monotonous. The waking life of the eye, for instance, is simply an endless succession of visual perceptions; and what monotony could be more

profound than that. On the other hand, it is a succession of visual perceptions of which no two between the cradle and the grave exactly resemble each other : and what better example of infinite variety could there be than that ? Hence, to use Socrates's phrase of hypocritical sympathy with a confuted adversary, " we seem in danger of having to admit " that monotony must be in ourselves and cannot be in the world without. It is, in fact, our own personal contribution to the sum of things. It is a portion of that inexhaustible fund of " tediousness " which, in the liberal spirit of Chief Constable Dogberry, we handsomely bestow upon the Cosmos.

To the man who sees no difference between one human being and another a London street is monotonous, as are the Alps to him who finds every peak and pass and glacier exactly like the last. Thus, then, if any one pleases to say, as some have been heard to say, that the Nile Valley up to the First Cataract is a mere tiresome succession of

palm trees and mud villages, a perpetual panorama of long levels of greenest verdure, broken every here and there by reaches of yellow sandbank, with an eternal foreground of bright-blue river and an everlasting background of grey or red gold mountains, it would be idle to gainsay him. If that is all that there seems to him to be on the Nile, then that is all that the Nile *is*—for him. A palm-tree “by the river brim” has no more charm—for the wrong sort of eye—than a primrose in the same situation. Nay, if any man fails to find a beauty in the very monotony, as he would doubtless call it, of this stately plumed procession sweeping slowly past him for six hundred miles of river—if he does not feel to the very core of his being their indefinable harmony with man and nature in these regions, their indissoluble affinity with the wilderness which they fringe, and with the ancient world-relics amid which they stand, the attempt to impress him with it would be vain. But if by chance he does

feel it, he will no more find monotony on the banks of the Nile than he could find it in the heaven of unchanging stars.

The peculiar glamour of the palm is, like most other such mysterious appeals to the imagination through the senses, hard to seize and analyse. Yet it is undeniable and unmistakable. In all ages it has captured the romantic temperament and stormed the citadel of the poet's heart. Heine's exquisite lyric, with its image of the northern pine-tree dreaming in the frozen silence of its brother the palm in the burning sands of the desert, does not stand alone, though it does stand before all others. And the tree is as dear to those races who are native to its soil as to the poets and artists of the North.

Tu tambien insigne palma
Eres aqui forestiera.

“Thou, too, O noble palm,” ran the sweet, sad lament of the Moorish captive in Spain ;
“thou, too, art a stranger in this land even

as I." For him the palm of Southern Europe was a mere exotic flourishing only in such latitudes under exceptionally favourable conditions, and the prisoner sighed for the towering stems and spreading frondage of his African home. Perhaps there was something more than mere nostalgic prejudice in his plaintive cry. "We do it wrong, being so majestic," to set the palm in the midst of European vegetation. Its charm, no doubt, is largely of the spiritual and imaginative order—a charm depending not only upon perfect accord with its surroundings, but upon unchallenged supremacy therein. It is the child of solitude and the brother of sterility. Its natural companions are the sandhill and the limestone rock, or at best those rare low-lying shrubs of the desert that lift up no head to a tenth part of its full stature. Even the green floor of the Nile banks seems almost alien to it, and it needs that same "monotonous" background of mountain and wilderness to keep it "in the picture."

But so placed, as it is here, the eye must be strangely incurious and unappreciative that finds any lack of variety in the landscape wherein the palm plays so continual a part. Those who charge it with sameness are deceived by its mere uniformity of general outline. Architecturally speaking, it must be admitted that this famous tree is simplicity itself. The irreverent have been known to compare it to a mop which has earned its right to retirement by long and wearing services; and, indeed, the broad resemblance between stem and handle, drooping fronds and well-worn mop-head, could hardly escape the eye of a child. Comparing it, for instance, with the countless shapes assumed by the English tree which stands first for beauty of line—the beech—one might have thought it beyond the power even of so inventive an artist as Nature to get much variety out of the endless repetition of this simple figure. Nature, however, has signally triumphed over these difficulties of her own creation. With-

out varying, except within very narrow limits, the form of the palm, she varies its angle of growth, its grouping, its artistic function and significance in the scene with a fertility of invention which seems inexhaustible. There is no tree which lends itself to so great a number or so manifold a variety of decorative purposes in landscape, none which "composes" so well, in the artist's phrase, as the palm. Alone, in groups of two or three, in clumps of a dozen or a score, in widely scattered "plantations" of fifty to a hundred, in thickest groves of double or treble that number, its effect is equally satisfying, and its value to the eye alike inestimable in all. Its simplest dispositions are full of charm and of command.

Simplicity, indeed, may almost be said to constitute the chief and abiding fascination of Nile scenery as a whole; the broadest effects, produced by the slenderest of means, abound. Here, before me, at an ordinary bend of the river—one among thousands of

others so like, yet so unlike it—is an example ready to hand. On the narrow spit of land that thrusts itself lance-like into the broad bosom of the waters stands a little group of palms, the guardians of a tiny Arab village. Shorewise from their roots runs a long narrow strip of intensely vivid green. Inland, for miles behind it, the “lone and level sands stretch far away,” their dusty yellow melting gradually at the horizon into the pearl-grey of the morning sky. In mid-stream a single lateen-sail hovers over the glassy surface of the river, like some huge water-fowl, motionless, blinding white. There is nothing more ; it is the very slightest of impressionist sketches, dashed off as it were in half a dozen strokes of Nature’s most careless brush ; but it is perfect with a perfection of its own, and is of the kind which lives long in the memory of the eye. In every such delightful vignette of river scenery—and at every turn of the Nile there is a fresh one—the palm is the dominant feature.

And unlike so many other trees which require a strong light to be seen at their best, its beauty is the same at all hours. It is beautiful with all its midday grace of line when other trees have become mere masses of darkening shadow under the gloaming; and it is the first to trace itself against the dawn-grey of the Eastern heaven. The fir itself shows not more nobly when the sunset flames behind its stem; nor is there anywhere so “adorable a dreamer” in the moonlight.

But the Nile has something more wonderful to show than the scenery of its shores—something more beautiful than its majestic palms, and more enduring than even its golden mountains. Never elsewhere is the “incomparable pomp of eve” so gorgeous as in the skies which it reflects, and nowhere does the funeral pageant of the departed day defile with such entrancing and long-drawn splendour as across its waters. The Nile sunsets are famous, and every evening of the

three weeks we have spent upon the river there was a general muster of the whole strength of our steamer's passengers to assist at these magnificent obsequies. Hardly upon a single night of the whole twenty did they disappoint us, and the brilliancy and richness of the colours on which, night after night, we feasted our eyes were not more extraordinary than their inexhaustible variety of scheme. There is not a colour-tube in the artist's paint-box which would not, on one evening or another, have been called into requisition, and there is scarcely one which he would not have found himself mixing on his palette into some new and exquisite combination with another. The hues of the western horizon at the actual moment of the sun's disappearance below it might, no doubt, except in point of intensity, be matched in a colder sky. In England, under fortunate conditions, one has often seen a blaze of sunset glory which it is impossible to outdo, and which no southern or tropical clime could do more

than match. It is in the lights and colours of the entire firmament taken as a whole that the difference here is felt, in the far-reaching translucency of the northern and southern quarters of the heaven, and in that sensation of an infinitely widened world which is an effect of the clearness of the atmosphere.

A second point in which a Nile sunset distances all competitors elsewhere is in its performances, so to speak, as a "water colourist." No one who has not seen this artist at work can have the faintest conception of the astonishing feats which he performs with the smooth surface of the river for his sketching-block, or of the daring "slapdash" with which he flings his pigments upon it, or of the transcendent success of the result. He reserved his most startling effect till the very last day of our trip. On that evening the sun went down in a perfect sea of flame, which overflowed into the Nile waters. As good luck would have it, the wake of our steamer was racing straight through this flaming flood,

and the waves streamed aft from the paddle-wheels, a deep purple in their hollows and on every rounded crest a bar of ruddy gold. A German artist sat near me desperately dashing in the colours upon his sketching-block as they glowed before him ; but if he values his reputation for veracity he will never show any one that sketch when it is finished, for most certainly no one who sees it will believe it.

Yet, after all, it is not so much the actual sunset itself as its sequel which is the miraculous thing. For what words can describe the magic, the long-drawn sweetness, the strange, wild beauty of the Egyptian afterglow? Everywhere, or at least in all latitudes in which this epilogue of the nightly world drama is given at all, it is impressive ; but elsewhere it is short in duration and more or less subdued in tone. In the tropics, as is well known, it is the custom to dispense with it altogether. " The sun's rim dips, the stars rush out ; at one stride comes the dark," remarks the Ancient Mariner, describing his

agitating experiences, and it is for the scientific to explain why six hundred miles up the Nile, on the very threshold of the Tropic of Cancer, the afterglow should last almost thrice as long as it does elsewhere in the temperate zone. But so it is. To call it an epilogue of the mystery play of sunset is perhaps to describe it inadequately. In reality it is an additional and more profoundly interesting act of the great drama. It is the very reverse of the phenomenon depicted in Coleridge's two pregnant lines. The dipping of the sun's rim in these regions is followed by no outrush of the stars, no striding forward of the dark. On the contrary, after some ten minutes or so of fading twilight, such as in other lands is a mere prelude to complete darkness, the whole heaven suddenly lightens up again.

The grey of dusk almost disappears, and objects near and distant which had been melting into obscurity start once more, as though touched by the wand of an enchanter,

into clear and sharply outlined view. It is as though the sun, instead of having just set, were about to rise; it is like the dawn of a new day. Brighter and brighter grows the afterglow, and more and more golden as it brightens, the red rays of the prism which assume such prominence in most European sunsets seeming here—no doubt for some good optical reason, if one only knew it—to be far surpassed in intensity by the yellow. To describe the mysterious, the almost “eerie” light-effect produced by this flood of liquid gold immersing and suffusing the whole earth for long after the sun’s disc has disappeared, and while the northern and eastern skies are darkening every minute, is impossible; but the nearest though a distant resemblance to it that one remembers in England is to be found in that unearthly light that sometimes gleams luridly under a brazen-bellied thunder-cloud on a sultry summer afternoon. Things look just as spectral in the Egyptian afterglow as they do with us

in one of those storm-laden hours when "wildly dashed on tower and tree, The sun-beam strikes along the world." Only they are thrice as vividly outlined, thrice as solidly projected against their background of earth or sky.

During this reillumining of the landscape the deep orange of the western horizon has glowed steadily and undimmed ; but meanwhile the quarter of the heaven lying immediately above it has undergone an astonishing change. "God made himself an awful rose of dawn," wrote Tennyson in the "Vision of Sin," and fastidious critics have been known to object alike to the figure and to the phrase—to the imagery as false, and to the expression as affected. Yet all but the last two words of the description might be applied with perfect truth and sobriety to the after-glow of a sunset on the Nile. For slowly during all this time there has been ascending from the skyline of the desert as its base, and to an altitude of full thirty degrees above it,

a glorious arc of the softest rose colour, which melts as it draws nearer to the blue of the zenith into a gradually paling lilac, through the very midst of which looks forth the silver of the evening star. The chastened magnificence, the sober splendour of this atmospheric effect surpasses imagination. It is the very classicism of colour, just as the gorgeous hues of the actual sunset—its splashes of fierce crimson and blazing gold—might stand as typical of the rich exuberance of romance. But the time and space of this ærial marvel, the sphere of its radiance and the spell of its duration, are, perhaps, most wonderful of all. Laterally measured, this arc of glory spans a full quarter of the horizon—from due north-west to a point about midway between west and south. Vertically, as has already been said, it climbs at least one-third of the dome of sky between the horizon and the zenith; and it lasts in flawless and unimpaired beauty for a full half-hour. The sunset orange against which yon passing string of camels

and their turbaned leaders are silhouetted black as jet will have faded into purple haze, the evening star will have changed from a rayless speck of silver into a flashing jewel, and the lake of lilac in which it swims will have become blanched and colourless ere that great rose-window through which we have been gazing as into the lighted cathedral of the heavens is itself at last swallowed up in night.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TEMPLE-SERVANT OF AMMON

WHERE are their palaces ? is a question often asked in perplexity by those who find themselves for the first time among the remains of Ancient Egypt. They built both their tombs and their temples for eternity. Yet of their earthly houses, stately and splendid as the abodes of, at any rate, the greater and prouder of the Egyptian kings must have been, not a trace remains. We not only know not how or where the Royal builders of the Pyramids lived while their wretched slaves were toiling on the sands of Ghizeh, but we are as little able to fix the habitations of the much later monarchs who raised or added to that gigantic pillar forest at Karnak, or who carved the colossi on the rock-face

at Abu Simbel. The Egyptologist's explanation of this puzzle is, of course, a familiar one. Magnificent as may have been, and doubtless were, the palaces of the Egyptian kings, it was not necessary for their constructors to aim at anything more than temporary splendour. If the palace served the purposes of the king and his successors for a few generations it was enough. He looked to the temple to perpetuate his memory, and to the deeply graven sculpturings on its walls to keep his name and his exploits in everlasting remembrance. What mattered it whether the house in which Rameses abode during his short life on earth remained or disappeared, so long as the record of his great deeds was imperishably secured? His tomb, of course, was built for eternity on other grounds. It was part of his religion to make it so if possible, just as it was a matter of religious duty to provide if he could for the punctual supply of his entombed mummy with the aliment necessary for the due sustenance of its

“double” in the other world. This has naturally raised the question why Egyptian tombs are not more numerous than they are ; to which the answer current among Irish students of Egyptology is that as a matter of fact they are considerably more numerous than that, only they have not yet been discovered. It was not, of course, to be expected that the private citizen—even the “prominent” citizen of ancient Thebes or Memphis—could afford to hew out and decorate for himself a subterranean sepulchre on the scale of a Seti ; and many of the death-chambers of such persons have no doubt crumbled into irremediable decay. But it is probable that very many more are only awaiting the spade of the excavator. Their smaller dimensions have made them more difficult to light upon and to extricate from the heaped-up dust of ages, than are the tombs of the kings, queens, princesses, and high-priests which have been discovered and laid open to the inspection of the modern

world. There must be many and many a counterpart of the exquisite little tomb of the "Temple servant Nekht," lying hidden under the wind-blown sands of the Libyan desert, in the vast Necropolis of Thebes.

At present, however, this singular and most touching relic of an infinitely remote civilisation is practically unique. The only tombs which approach it in purely human interest are those of Ameni and Chnemu-Hetep, on the hill of Beni Hassan, for in the long autobiographical inscription with which the tomb of the former is decorated, there is something which comes much closer home to the common sympathies of mankind in every age than in all the monotonous boastings on the temple-wall of the king. It is in the same complacent vein, it is true, but it awakens a response in hearts which the epic of Pentaur leaves utterly cold. "I have done all that I have said," wrote this provincial governor 2400 years before Christ. "I am a gracious and a compassionate man,

and a ruler who loves his town. I have passed the course of years as the ruler of Meh, and all the labours of the palace have been carried out at my hands. I have given to the overseers of the temples of the gods of Meh 3000 bulls with their cows, and I was in favour in the palace on account of it, for I carried all the products of the milk-bearing cows to the palace, and no contributions to the king's storehouses have been more than mine. I have never made a child grieve, I have never robbed the widow, I have never repulsed the labourer, I have never shut up a herdsman, I have never impressed for forced labour the labourers of a man who only employed free men. There was never a person miserable in my time, no one went hungry under my rule, for if there were years of scarcity I ploughed up all the arable land in the home of such up to its very frontiers on the north and south. By this means I made its people live and procured for them provisions, so that there was not a hungry

person among them. I gave to the widow the same amount as I gave to the married woman, and I made no distinction between the great and little in all that I gave. And, behold, when the inundation was great and the owners of the land became rich thereby I laid no additional tax on the fields."

Here is a lesson from the ages on the question of "unearned increment." Has any modern controller of taxation, Imperial or local, so clear a record as this? It is a short inscription, but it is worth a whole wall full of the vapourings of Rameses II. over his famous battle with the Hittites—a piece of almost ludicrously vainglorious writing which the great conqueror has repeated in more than one of the mural records left behind by him in the temples of his construction, and the style of which was not approached in "general orders," so far as one knows, until the days of Napoleon Bonaparte. The sculptured representation of this eternal victory over the Hittites becomes at last a

weariness to the student's soul. Rameses the Great in his chariot discharging volleys of arrows among the Hittites, with his charioteer visible in miniature between his legs; Rameses the Great destroying his defeated enemies, apparently in cold blood, where the great King has got a whole batch of them by the hair like a bunch of vegetables, and is menacing them with a weapon which looks at a distance like a life-preserver, but on a closer view is seen to possess the facilities of a scalping-knife; Rameses the Great returning in triumph; the King making offerings to Ammon-Râ, with an interminable train of Hittite captives behind him, each couple chained together on a different principle from the preceding one. There is just a little too much of it, and after a long course of victory over the Hittites it is quite refreshing to meet with the wall-painting of his degenerate successor, Rameses III., playing chess in his harem. There is, of course, nothing of this kind

in the Epic of Pentaur, but a poem about the domestic life of the Egyptian monarchs would be very welcome after many perusals of the famous battle-piece of that very early Laureate.

In fact, the further one gets from "official poetry," and from official tomb inscriptions in general, the nearer you get to Nature, and even in the sepulchre of Chnemu-Hetep you are conscious of a smack of officialism in the otherwise simple recital of the Governor's public services and private virtues in general. In the case of Nekht, however, we really get, as Mr. Wallis Budge has said, a typical example of the tomb of a "Theban gentleman of the Middle Empire," or, in other words, of a gentleman who lived, moved, and had his being, who loved and hated, and hoped and feared, and worked and played on the site of these ruins, say a thousand and odd years before the Greek Father of History was born, and nearly two thousand years before history begins for our own islands with

the first settlement of the Saxons on English shores. Nekht, it is true, was, in a certain limited sense, a public official. He was a "temple servant" of Ammon, and his sister, of whom he obviously thought a great deal, was also attached to the religious ritual and services of that deity; but though he never fails to give himself and her their sacerdotal descriptions on his tomb-walls, he seems to have done so rather as a matter of private devoutness and piety than in any official spirit. The exquisite little tomb, in fact, which has only been opened six or seven years, and the wall-paintings on the ceiling, which are in many places still as clear in design and as beautifully fresh in colour as when they were put on more than thirty centuries ago, had evidently been the delight of its future occupant during its construction and decoration.

A pious Theban gentleman of the Middle Empire "made his soul" by making himself a costly and artistic sepulchre, just as a Western devotee of our own day makes it

by building a church or endowing a religious order. One sees in a moment that Nekht must have worked lovingly at his own little "bijou residence" for eternity. It is nearly finished, but not quite; its incomplete condition meaning, it is to be feared, in this as in other cases, that the heir was of opinion that the deceased had spent quite enough money on his hobby, that it was really quite sufficiently decorated to do all reasonable credit to the family, and that on the whole the tomb might be closed without calling upon the artist to add the colours to that little wall-scene which he had just "blocked out" in black and white in one corner of the chamber when the late lamented paid the debt of nature. Unfortunately, the imperfection of the pictured record begins at the very point at which the dead man's deeply religious instincts would have made him particularly regret the failure to complete it. In this scene Nekht and his wife are seated at a table loaded with funereal offerings, and four

priestly officials are bringing up haunches of veal or beef. To have left this plain instead of coloured was a grave omission. Did Nekht suffer for it in the underworld, one wonders? Did it undo the work of those multiplied prayers in hieroglyphic, the incessant reiteration of which on the walls of Egyptian mortuary-chambers produces almost an effect of passionate appeal? Osiris and Harmachis, and Ammon and Anubis are again and again beseeched to grant favours to "the double of the temple-servant, Nekht, a free passport for the disembodied soul to the regions of the dead, a coming-in and going-out from the underworld, not being repulsed at its gates." It is to be hoped that there was no hitch in the arrangements.

The temple-servant, however, was evidently a cheery soul, and seems to have been not less interested in the things of this world than in those of the other. It is this which brings him so much nearer to us than all the conquering and building kings who have raised

their gigantic temples, and mined the earth with their vast sepulchres all up the valley of the Nile. Nekht has made his artists set forth scenes of his daily life, its business and its pleasures. Here we see his farm-servants gathering grapes, treading them in the wine-press, and drawing off the new wine into jars. Here, again, are men ploughing and reaping, women gleaning, labourers binding up the sheaves. Nekht looks on with a complacent air of proprietorship, with the inscription above his head, "Sitting in the chamber seeth his fields, the temple-servant of Ammon, Nekht triumphant before the great God." Further on, we see the worthy citizen taking a holiday with his wife and children. They have, in fact, gone out for a day's sport, and are spearing fish from a boat, and bringing down birds with the boomerang in a papyrus swamp. Above is the inscription : " Passeth through wild-fowl marshes, traverseth wild-fowl marshes with gladness, speareth fish, Nekht triumphant." On the bank stand two

of his servants holding sandals, staff, boomerang, &c., and lower down is another servant bringing the game to his master. The inscriptions above it read : " Rejoiceth, seeth happiness in making the chase and in the work of the Goddess Sekhet " (the country goddess, the Ceres of the ancient Egyptians) ; " the temple-servant Nekht triumphant. His sister the singing priestess of Ammon, the lady of the house, Tani, saith, ' Rejoice thou in the work of Sekhet and the birds which he (Nekht) sets apart for her selection.' " Such was the sort of diary of his simple pursuits and pleasures this Theban gentleman of the Middle Empire kept upon the walls of his tomb-chamber for perpetual remembrance. It is like a page of Pepys in stone.

CHAPTER XV

A KHEDIVIAL PROGRESS

WHEN the Mudîr of Keneh presented his compliments to the officers and passengers of Messrs. Cook and Sons' Nile steamer, *Rameses*, and requested the pleasure of their company on the evening of Wednesday, January 10, at the reception to be given by him in honour of the visit of his Highness the Khedive, the Mudîr of Keneh reckoned without the inhabitants of Keneh and the surrounding villages, and without his own available staff of police. That is to say, he failed to form a concise estimate of the very considerable numbers of the one or the extremely slender force of the other. The consequence was that when the said Nile steamer *Rameses* had brought up alongside the Keneh landing-place, and

those of the passengers who "felt like it" had landed and made their way on foot or donkey-back to the Mudîr's house, to be presented to that worshipful functionary and receive from him the ceremonial coffee and cigarette, it became necessary for the chief of the police to break it gently to the spokesman of the party that the hospitable design of the Governor would have to be foregone. His house was over a mile from the shore ; the crowd, drawn together from many miles round by the Khedivial visit, was dense, and, except under the actual *kourbash*, inclined to be disorderly ; and, to put the matter briefly, there was not enough *kourbash* to "go round." In other words, the chief of the police did not see his way to providing an escort sufficiently large to conduct a party some five and twenty strong, and largely consisting of ladies, in safety from the steamer to the Mudîr's "At Home." The male passengers might risk their less valuable lives—or garments—by endeavouring to

make their way through the crowd if they pleased, but the softer sex was recommended to remain on shipboard. So the project was abandoned, and the "disinvited" guests assembled on the upper deck of their steamer to console themselves by viewing the arrival and reception of the Khedive from that excellent vantage-ground.

The occasion was certainly an interesting one. It is not often that one has the opportunity of seeing a newly succeeded Prince make his first acquaintance with the most famous and anciently historic portion of his dominions; yet, strange as it seems—or as it may, perhaps, seem until we remind ourselves of his extreme youth—the present Khedive of Egypt had never before been up the Nile. He was now making his first State progress up its sacred stream as far as Wady Halfa, the virtual limit of his effective rule. Assuân, which we left two days ago, was gay with streamers and triumphal arches in readiness for his coming; it is the next place after this

at which he is to touch on his upward journey. Luxor, where he will stop only on his return voyage to Cairo, has still its preparations to make ; but Keneh, as indeed we could see half a mile off, on our approach to it, is determined to show that—like Todgers's—it “ can do it when it likes.” A specially constructed flight of landing-steps, gorgeous with crimson cloth, ascends the high river bank some hundred yards or so above the point at which we are moored, and at the entrance of the long straight road which leads to the town of Keneh rises a lofty arch of really light and graceful line, flanked on each side by a row of smaller ones, all of them thickly hung from base to summit with coloured lamps. A score or two of yards below us crowds quite a little fleet of dahabiyehs, every one of them all a-flutter with flags from hull to topmost “ top-joint ” of its fishing-rod of a yard. And exactly opposite us, though, indeed, by no undesigned coincidence, appears the most curious sight of all—the native crowd.

Probably enough it is one of the largest Egyptian gatherings ever got together outside, or at least at any distance from, the walls of a great city. Oriental hyperbole puts it down in our hearing at forty thousand ; but in all likelihood the speaker had never himself seen one-fifth of that number gathered together. Keneh, to be sure, is no "one-horse" place, as Egyptian townships go. It is the capital town of a district, and contains from fifteen to twenty thousand souls. If we suppose all its adult males to have turned out—there is, of course, only the merest sprinkling of women—and their strength to have been doubled by the recruits from the surrounding villages, we shall still be safe in halving the estimate given above. Nevertheless, there are enough of them within eye-shot, and, as we know to our cost, within earshot of us to make not merely a good show but an extraordinary and even bewildering spectacle.

The bank of the river lends itself admirably

to the theatrical *coup d'œil*. From water's edge to summit it ascends for some ten or twelve yards at an angle apparently steeper than forty-five degrees. To pack it with a European crowd would be impossible; the European boot and shoe, if nothing else, would forbid it. The naked and almost prehensile foot of the Egyptian fellah can only just manage to maintain him on the slope and no more; and inasmuch as the dry soil breaks away beneath him almost every other minute in a cloud of dust, continual readjustments of his position are necessary to keep him from slipping gradually into the Nile. It would be difficult for the most powerful imagination to conceive a situation of more hideous discomfort; yet for three mortal hours did the crowd occupy it, on and off, clinging to it as long as possible, and returning to it whenever the coercion, professional or amateur, which was from time to time applied to them, relaxed even for a moment. For a space of some fifty yards along the

shore, the whole of this steep declivity was packed from brow to base with white turbans, blue *gullabias*, brown faces, and flashing teeth. Not a foot of the bank was visible, save at the very edge of the water, so completely was it submerged beneath this cascade, this cataract of Oriental humanity.

It was as though notice had been given that "Egyptian fellahs may be shot here," and some colossus, suddenly endowed with life, had emptied a gigantic barrow-load of them down the bank. The little ones being the lightest, would naturally have rolled out first, and there, indeed, they are at the bottom of the slope, up to their knees in water and Nile mud, a dirty rag, which may have been a shirt under the Ptolemies, their only garment, and they themselves a mere incarnate cry for *bak-shîsh*. Few of them get it, perhaps only one, the sole artist of the assembled multitude—a blind youth with an endearing gift of mimicry, which enables him to delight us for a quarter

of an hour, and madden us for an hour and a half with curiously faithful imitations of a steamer's whistle, the bray of a donkey, the clucking of a hen, and other familiar sounds. Roars of laughter, in which an attentive ear may perhaps detect a note of satire, burst from the crowd as the performer passes with singular psychological insight through each one of those varied phases of emotion which agitate the donkey between the broken gasps from which his bray begins, the passionate *cri du cœur* in which it culminates, and the long, desolate wail with which it concludes. And the blind artist gets his piastres ultimately, though there is a scramble among the mud-larks to grasp them first, the popular feeling being apparently opposed to robbing the afflicted. Still he greatly outstays his welcome. Indeed, he prolongs his performance as unconscionably as though he were giving imitations of eminent actors at an English evening party, and the incessant yelling which has, as at all times, considerably impaired

the effect of his subtler efforts now drowns them altogether.

The crowd, in fact, appears to grow noisier and more restless every half-hour. The laughter and shouting and chatter of a British gathering of expectant sightseers would have died away into the silence of fatigue and of its dogged endurance long ere this ; but the animation and mobility, the bird-like chirp and hop and twitter of these people seem inexhaustible. Except for a row or two of greybeards on the upper tiers, they are never still. Every turban seems in perpetual movement, every eye rolling, every mouth grinning, every hand gesticulating. The mere shifting play of colours which it produces is wearying to the eye and brain. It is almost a relief when, at certain, or rather uncertain intervals, the bank is cleared, and another side of the almost infantile Egyptian character is exhibited, as childish fear and submissiveness take the place of childish merriment and noise. The Mudîr, as we

soon see, has not underrated the deficiencies of Keneh in the matter of police. No doubt the whole available force is engaged at the town, for the professional guardian of order rarely shows up at the river-side during these hours. This, however, matters comparatively little in provincial Egypt, where, apparently, any man with a *kourbash* and a consciousness of good intentions may play the part of policeman without any previous formality of a commission to discharge that office. The Arab crew of our steamer cheerfully undertake it, with pails of water discharged over the side, upon the heads of the too obtrusive crowd. The dragoman occasionally springs ashore and lays about him with his whip. An elderly man with a turban, but with no visible official badge of authority, "teaches" the men of Keneh every now and then, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth, though with a half-broken bamboo used flail-fashion instead of with "thorns and briars."

And every time this blunt Arabic form of

our English "Further back, please!" is administered there is a hasty scurrying of robes and turbans up the bank, as though a gust of wind had swept suddenly over a blue and white flower-bed; and for a few minutes the bare and dusty shore, lately hidden by a forest of brown legs, once more becomes visible, and a blessed silence reigns. No sooner, however, is the hand of "authority" removed than, pair by pair, the legs creep back again, wet and whipped, but supporting meekly, not to say abjectly, contented and unresentful owners, and again the bank is covered and the shrill, distracting clamour is renewed. Towards dusk it abates a little, but not with any signs of exhaustion on the part of the clamourers. It is merely that their audience is thinning as the hour for the Khedive's arrival draws near, and the unspeakable beauty of the Nile sunset attracts us to the opposite side of the boat. The sun has not long disappeared behind the Libyan mountains, and we are still in the midst of

that mysterious interval of twilight which seems in this wonderful atmosphere to divide the sunset from the afterglow, when, as though instinctively seizing upon the exact moment for throwing down their challenge to the departing day, the lights start out upon the triumphal arches along the shore and festoon the dahabiyehs on the water. The effect, as the sky gradually lightens again with the afterglow, and the lamps twinkle in silver through the flood of liquid gold that bathes land and water alike, is of an almost unearthly beauty. Minute by minute it changes, and the colours on shore and river, on the darkening hulls of the little fleet of pleasure-vessels, on the distant mountains, on the intervening tracts of verdure, and on the ever-moving crowd upon the bank, are changing every minute ; but it is a full half-hour before its last splendours fade away, and night settles down upon the Nile.

By this time we on the steamer begin to grow impatient, for though the Khedive shows

no signs of arriving the dinner-hour does. He was due at six, we had been told. Why tarry the wheels—or the screw—of his steam dahabiyeh? What if he should have changed his plans and determined not to arrive to-night at all? He is Oriental, in itself an element of uncertainty; he is believed to be something froward and self-willed, and he has probably no English adviser on board to remonstrate with him. Above all, he is young, and has perhaps not yet learnt that punctuality is the cardinal virtue of princes. It is with no little relief that we at last see the lights of His Highness's approaching dahabiyeh. Steaming past us amid the weird, barbaric chant of a body of Egyptian school-children greeting him from a brilliantly illuminated vessel moored amid-stream, it makes for the decorated landing-place. Guns salute, a band strikes up the somewhat Salvation-Army-like strains of the Khedivial Hymn; the boat is brought alongside. His Highness has arrived. We pull out our

watches, and anxiously consult them. He has beaten our dinner-hour by the shortest of heads. It might have been worse, and, well content, we betake ourselves to our meal, as he to his, for he is to dine and hold a reception of his own on board, before proceeding to the Mudîr's.

So long an affair, indeed, was this reception, that it afforded ample opportunity of studying the methods of Oriental State functions, and the striking contrast which they illustrate between the East and the West. In a European country, on an occasion of this kind, "programme" would be everything. The whole course of the day's or the night's ceremonial would have been fixed beforehand to the minutest detail, and the humblest spectator in the crowd would have the means, if he cared to avail himself of them, of ascertaining how, when, and where everything was to happen. Here, not only did nobody know anything for certain about Abbas Pasha's intended movements, but nobody,

not even perhaps the Mudîr himself, his prospective host, knew whether certainty was even attainable. The Khedive would not land till a much later hour than had been originally fixed. The Khedive would not land at all. The Khedive would land when his horses arrived. The Khedive's horses had arrived, but he would not land, as he had resolved to receive the notables of Keneh on board his steamer. In the meantime the one thing certain was that the Khedive was actually receiving the notables of Keneh, and that the ceremony promised to last a considerable time. For the best part of two hours an interminable procession of turbaned heads might be seen filing gravely from the bank on to the steamer, along its deck, up one of the stairways to the saloon, and down the other on to the deck again. Ulemas, judges, court officials of the district, Coptic priests, foreign consuls, local merchants, sheiks of the villages—there seemed no end to them.

But, all the while, the more watchful of the observers had noticed that a sort of spacious floating horse-box had been brought up at a "dummy" near the landing-stage, and that with much clatter of hoofs on woodwork the frightened animals were being landed. Then, all of a sudden, at about eleven o'clock there was a banging of explosive fireworks and a rocket soared into the air. The Khedive had landed! A minute more and he was dashing in a carriage-and-four up the mile-long lighted avenue to the Mudîr's house, in front of which stood the doomed bullocks, with their slaughterers standing over them ready to deliver the death-stroke in token of Oriental welcome as soon as he set foot on his servant's threshold. Through the gaps in the crowd could be seen the white chargers of his escort streaming at full gallop behind him, between two dense rows of dark and voiceless spectators, like riders in a dream. It was a strange, wild sight, but stranger far was the almost total absence of sound. Amid

all this flashing light and movement there was something positively uncanny in the accompanying silence. The roar of an English crowd as large as this would have been heard a mile off; yet this multitude, which for hours past had been deafening us with their incessant din, now stood before the Prince whose coming they had so long and patiently awaited, without uttering a single cry of welcome! True types of that mute and unresisting people who have known so many masters, and through and over whom, from the earliest ages of recorded history, conqueror after conqueror has swept as swift and dreamlike as Abbas Pasha and his train.

CHAPTER XVI

TWIRLING TO PARADISE

It is the Night of the Middle of Shabân, perhaps the most sacred, not to say awful, night in the whole Mohammedan year. For at a little after sunset this evening the Sidr—that mystic lote-tree which bears as many leaves as there are living beings in the world—will be shaken by the appointed angel in Paradise ; and on each leaf that comes fluttering down from it will be found inscribed the name of some person who is fated to die before the year is out. If he be destined to die very soon his leaf is almost wholly withered ; if later in the year a larger portion of it is still green ; but whether immediate or delayed his death within the prescribed period is assured. To every devout Moslem, there-

fore, this is a night for serious and solemn meditation, and no doubt there are many such pious spirits among those who are wending their way up the ascent to the citadel of Cairo and to the great mosque, whose slender minarets stand out to-night in unwonted clarity through the darkness, encircled, each of them, with a double ring of lights. Not so, however, with the majority of the crowd which surrounds us at the principal entrance into the buildings. Their errand is either that of the ordinary European sightseer, or of the native who lives by ministering to his wants. They are assembled to witness the State visit regularly paid by the Khedive on this night of the year to the mosque of Mohammed Ali, and they are waiting till he comes out, after the due performance of his devotions. Like most acts of homage paid by temporal potentates to Eternal Powers, it is appropriately limited in point of time; and, after no very severe trial of our patience, Abbas Pasha, who has developed into a young man of sin-

gularly undistinguished appearance and of a stoutness beyond his years, steps forth from the entrance porch, divests himself of his slippers in the midst of salaaming satellites, and, entering his brougham, drives rapidly away. Then the crowding sightseers push and jostle towards the doorway, and, gradually squeezing through it, flow wide, like water suddenly liberated from a conduit, over the spacious floor within.

Large as is the concourse of people who have poured into the building, they are scarcely more than enough to dot the vast area of the great mosque with a mere score or so of scattered groups. There is space and to spare between them for the eye to gratify itself with the rich warm hues of the immense carpets, gifts of successive Khedives to the sacred foundation, and among the finest and most splendid fabrics that Eastern looms have ever produced. The hundreds of chandeliers dependent from the lofty roof, and never lighted save now and during the

Ramadán, have converted the whole huge cupola into one great constellation, dissolving its upper glooms into a luminous mist and bathing its lower walls and pillars of grained and gleaming alabaster in softest radiance. The effect is magnificent beyond conception, though as little devotional as can well be imagined. To the eye of an unbeliever it might seem to be rather an Aladdin's palace than a house of prayer. It is to the ear alone that the character either of the place or of the people reveals itself; and it is to the groups of seated figures from whom the "noise of worship" proceeds that the curious direct their steps.

The comparatively staid and unemotional worshippers—the little batches of Arabs ten or twelve strong who are reciting verses of the Koran in a low monotone or crooning responses after the professional "reader" who has come to the aid of their illiteracy—collect but scanty audiences. The chief centre of attraction lies elsewhere. It is to

be found in that ring of squatting and swaying devotees who have chosen their "pitch" in the south-east corner of the mosque, on the same side of it as the great tomb of Mohammed Ali. For those—and they probably form a majority of the foreign visitors—who have on some previous day hurried over their lunch in order to hear the so-called "Howling Dervishes" give what has been irreverently described as "their celebrated farmyard imitation," this performance in the mosque may fail to prove a "draw."

The spectacle is to be witnessed down at the Kasr-el-Ain Mosque in Old Cairo—and is variously reported upon by some as "an extraordinary sight which I would not have missed for anything," by others as "a disgusting exhibition that no one should look at who desires to retain a spark of respect for human nature" and by yet others, as contemptuously and more concisely, as "the biggest fraud in Egypt"—it is at least unique in its kind. Even if it be to a certain extent

“faked,” as the critics last quoted insinuate—even if a certain considerable percentage of these grunting contortionists have the perfunctory air of “supers” at a piastre a day, and among them you recognise unmistakably typical specimens of the bazaar-tout, the street dragoman out at elbows, and other worthy or unworthy citizens, certainly not affiliated to any religious order of Islam—what then? Mabilie itself, that once famous temple-grove of the “great goddess Lubricity,” could not in its later days dispense with the services of hired ministrants for the due performance of its saltatory ritual, and had to supplement the declining zeal of its *habitués* by the mercenary agility of the *calicot* and the *cocotte* masquerading as the *grisette*. And, anyhow, the performers in the little monastic courtyard of the Kasr-el-Ain Mosque, unlike those who disported themselves in the sylvan shades of the Parisian pleasure-garden, can at least show a leaven of *bonâ-fide* devotees.

Some of these wild-eyed, neurotic, semi-imbecile creatures belong to a type which is familiar enough all over the world, and which you may meet with in every costume and under every sky. Nature only too plainly proclaims them the congenital victims of some one or other of the many forms of hysteria. When these men jerk their heads in concert from side to side, accompanying each jerk with a grunt like that which punctuates every thud of a pavior's rammer ; when they groan in unison ; when they gasp and pant and croon in response to the whining quaver of the old precentor in a filthy turban and frowsy gaberdine, who "deacons off" the extraordinary choir ; when, above all, they bow till their bodies are bent double, each of them flinging forward his dirty mane till its ends almost touch the ground and then throwing it back again over his shoulders—you can see that the thing is genuine, or at any rate as much so as such manifestations of religious excitement ever are. For

what analysis will ever disengage and measure the ingredient of personal vanity which enters into and combines with disinterested enthusiasm in all public exhibitions of extravagant and unusual forms of devout emotion ? Every religious zealot, from a Brahmin fakir to an English Revivalist, has one eye only upon the deity of his worship, and the other upon the spectator. Who can say which of the two organs of vision fixes the more intent gaze on its object ?

The howlers of to-night in the Mosque of Mohammed Ali are noisier than the dervishes in the Kasr-el-Ain, but then they are, perhaps, a little more human. In revenge, however, their grimaces are more hideous, and their cervical column seems to have such a peculiar pliancy as to create the agreeable illusion that their heads, which they wag from side to side with a looseness that puts to shame the fore-and-aft nutations of the porcelain mandarin, are about to part company with their bodies. On the whole, they

form a sufficiently repulsive sight ; and it is only the erect devotee, who stands in the centre of their circle, and to whose performance these moppings and mowings are a species of accompaniment that contrives to interest, without disgusting, the Western spectator. The Dancing Dervishes, for some reason or other, have ceased to dance at the Tekiyet-el-Maulawîyeh, the usual scene of their antics, for the present ; but one of their number is here to-night. Without any prelude he has stepped quietly into the ring, a thin anæmic youth of barely twenty, clad in the sort of long striped *soutane* which these mystics affect. Extending his arms at right angles to his body he begins to twirl, and for five and twenty mortal minutes, by the independent testimony of many watches, he continues to do so. He was twirling "when our parcel left," as the cricket reporters say, and being then evidently "well set," it is impossible to say how long the innings may have lasted. Every now and then, say, at

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for the best part of half an hour, and that without ever once calling upon the spectator, in the words of the well-known comic ballad, to "see me reverse," is an accomplishment of far greater rarity and merit.

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hands of the two rustic figures in Millet's "Angelus," as a corrective to the vulgar corybantics of Hallelujah lasses, and to "take away the taste" of Happy Eliza with her coal-scuttle bonnet and tambourine.

all this flashing light and movement there was something positively uncanny in the accompanying silence. The roar of an English crowd as large as this would have been heard a mile off; yet this multitude, which for hours past had been deafening us with their incessant din, now stood before the Prince whose coming they had so long and patiently awaited, without uttering a single cry of welcome! True types of that mute and unresisting people who have known so many masters, and through and over whom, from the earliest ages of recorded history, conqueror after conqueror has swept as swift and dreamlike as Abbas Pasha and his train.

CHAPTER XVI

TWIRLING TO PARADISE

IT is the Night of the Middle of Shabân, perhaps the most sacred, not to say awful, night in the whole Mohammedan year. For at a little after sunset this evening the Sidr—that mystic lote-tree which bears as many leaves as there are living beings in the world—will be shaken by the appointed angel in Paradise ; and on each leaf that comes fluttering down from it will be found inscribed the name of some person who is fated to die before the year is out. If he be destined to die very soon his leaf is almost wholly withered ; if later in the year a larger portion of it is still green ; but whether immediate or delayed his death within the prescribed period is assured. To every devout Moslem, there-

fore, this is a night for serious and solemn meditation, and no doubt there are many such pious spirits among those who are wending their way up the ascent to the citadel of Cairo and to the great mosque, whose slender minarets stand out to-night in unwonted clarity through the darkness, encircled, each of them, with a double ring of lights. Not so, however, with the majority of the crowd which surrounds us at the principal entrance into the buildings. Their errand is either that of the ordinary European sightseer, or of the native who lives by ministering to his wants. They are assembled to witness the State visit regularly paid by the Khedive on this night of the year to the mosque of Mohammed Ali, and they are waiting till he comes out, after the due performance of his devotions. Like most acts of homage paid by temporal potentates to Eternal Powers, it is appropriately limited in point of time; and, after no very severe trial of our patience, Abbas Pasha, who has developed into a young man of sin-

gularly undistinguished appearance and of a stoutness beyond his years, steps forth from the entrance porch, divests himself of his slippers in the midst of salaaming satellites, and, entering his brougham, drives rapidly away. Then the crowding sightseers push and jostle towards the doorway, and, gradually squeezing through it, flow wide, like water suddenly liberated from a conduit, over the spacious floor within.

Large as is the concourse of people who have poured into the building, they are scarcely more than enough to dot the vast area of the great mosque with a mere score or so of scattered groups. There is space and to spare between them for the eye to gratify itself with the rich warm hues of the immense carpets, gifts of successive Khedives to the sacred foundation, and among the finest and most splendid fabrics that Eastern looms have ever produced. The hundreds of chandeliers dependent from the lofty roof, and never lighted save now and during the

Ramadán, have converted the whole huge cupola into one great constellation, dissolving its upper glooms into a luminous mist and bathing its lower walls and pillars of grained and gleaming alabaster in softest radiance. The effect is magnificent beyond conception, though as little devotional as can well be imagined. To the eye of an unbeliever it might seem to be rather an Aladdin's palace than a house of prayer. It is to the ear alone that the character either of the place or of the people reveals itself; and it is to the groups of seated figures from whom the "noise of worship" proceeds that the curious direct their steps.

The comparatively staid and unemotional worshippers—the little batches of Arabs ten or twelve strong who are reciting verses of the Koran in a low monotone or crooning responses after the professional "reader" who has come to the aid of their illiteracy—collect but scanty audiences. The chief centre of attraction lies elsewhere. It is to

be found in that ring of squatting and swaying devotees who have chosen their "pitch" in the south-east corner of the mosque, on the same side of it as the great tomb of Mohammed Ali. For those—and they probably form a majority of the foreign visitors—who have on some previous day hurried over their lunch in order to hear the so-called "Howling Dervishes" give what has been irreverently described as "their celebrated farmyard imitation," this performance in the mosque may fail to prove a "draw."

The spectacle is to be witnessed down at the Kasr-el-Ain Mosque in Old Cairo—and is variously reported upon by some as "an extraordinary sight which I would not have missed for anything," by others as "a disgusting exhibition that no one should look at who desires to retain a spark of respect for human nature" and by yet others, as contemptuously and more concisely, as "the biggest fraud in Egypt"—it is at least unique in its kind. Even if it be to a certain extent

“faked,” as the critics last quoted insinuate—even if a certain considerable percentage of these grunting contortionists have the perfunctory air of “supers” at a piastre a day, and among them you recognise unmistakably typical specimens of the bazaar-tout, the street dragoman out at elbows, and other worthy or unworthy citizens, certainly not affiliated to any religious order of Islam—what then? Mabilie itself, that once famous temple-grove of the “great goddess Lubricity,” could not in its later days dispense with the services of hired ministrants for the due performance of its saltatory ritual, and had to supplement the declining zeal of its *habitnés* by the mercenary agility of the *calicot* and the *cocotte* masquerading as the *grisette*. And, anyhow, the performers in the little monastic courtyard of the Kasr-el-Ain Mosque, unlike those who disported themselves in the sylvan shades of the Parisian pleasure-garden, can at least show a leaven of *bonâ-fide* devotees.

Some of these wild-eyed, neurotic, semi-imbecile creatures belong to a type which is familiar enough all over the world, and which you may meet with in every costume and under every sky. Nature only too plainly proclaims them the congenital victims of some one or other of the many forms of hysteria. When these men jerk their heads in concert from side to side, accompanying each jerk with a grunt like that which punctuates every thud of a pavior's rammer; when they groan in unison; when they gasp and pant and croon in response to the whining quaver of the old precentor in a filthy turban and frowsy gaberdine, who "deacons off" the extraordinary choir; when, above all, they bow till their bodies are bent double, each of them flinging forward his dirty mane till its ends almost touch the ground and then throwing it back again over his shoulders—you can see that the thing is genuine, or at any rate as much so as such manifestations of religious excitement ever are. For

what analysis will ever disengage and measure the ingredient of personal vanity which enters into and combines with disinterested enthusiasm in all public exhibitions of extravagant and unusual forms of devout emotion? Every religious zealot, from a Brahmin fakir to an English Revivalist, has one eye only upon the deity of his worship, and the other upon the spectator. Who can say which of the two organs of vision fixes the more intent gaze on its object?

The howlers of to-night in the Mosque of Mohammed Ali are noisier than the dervishes in the Kasr-el-Ain, but then they are, perhaps, a little more human. In revenge, however, their grimaces are more hideous, and their cervical column seems to have such a peculiar pliancy as to create the agreeable illusion that their heads, which they wag from side to side with a looseness that puts to shame the fore-and-aft nutations of the porcelain mandarin, are about to part company with their bodies. On the whole, they

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This book first appeared serially in the columns of "The Daily Telegraph," to the Proprietors of which journal thanks are due for permission to reprint.







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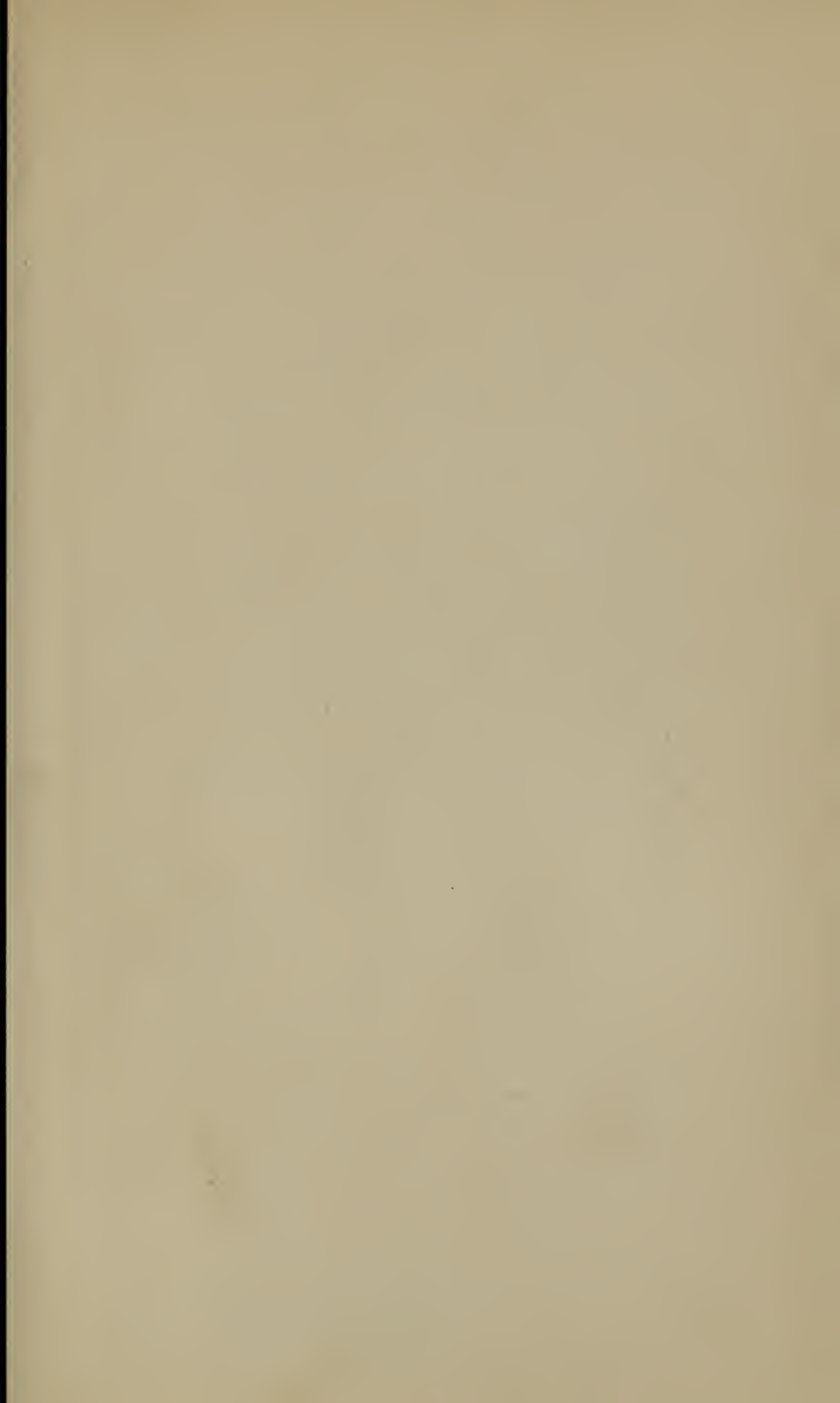
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